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Poughkeepsie sues Dutchess County over homeless shelter placement

City officials say the county's plan to put a 99-bed shelter in a Northside neighborhood would reinforce racial segregation and unfairly burden residents

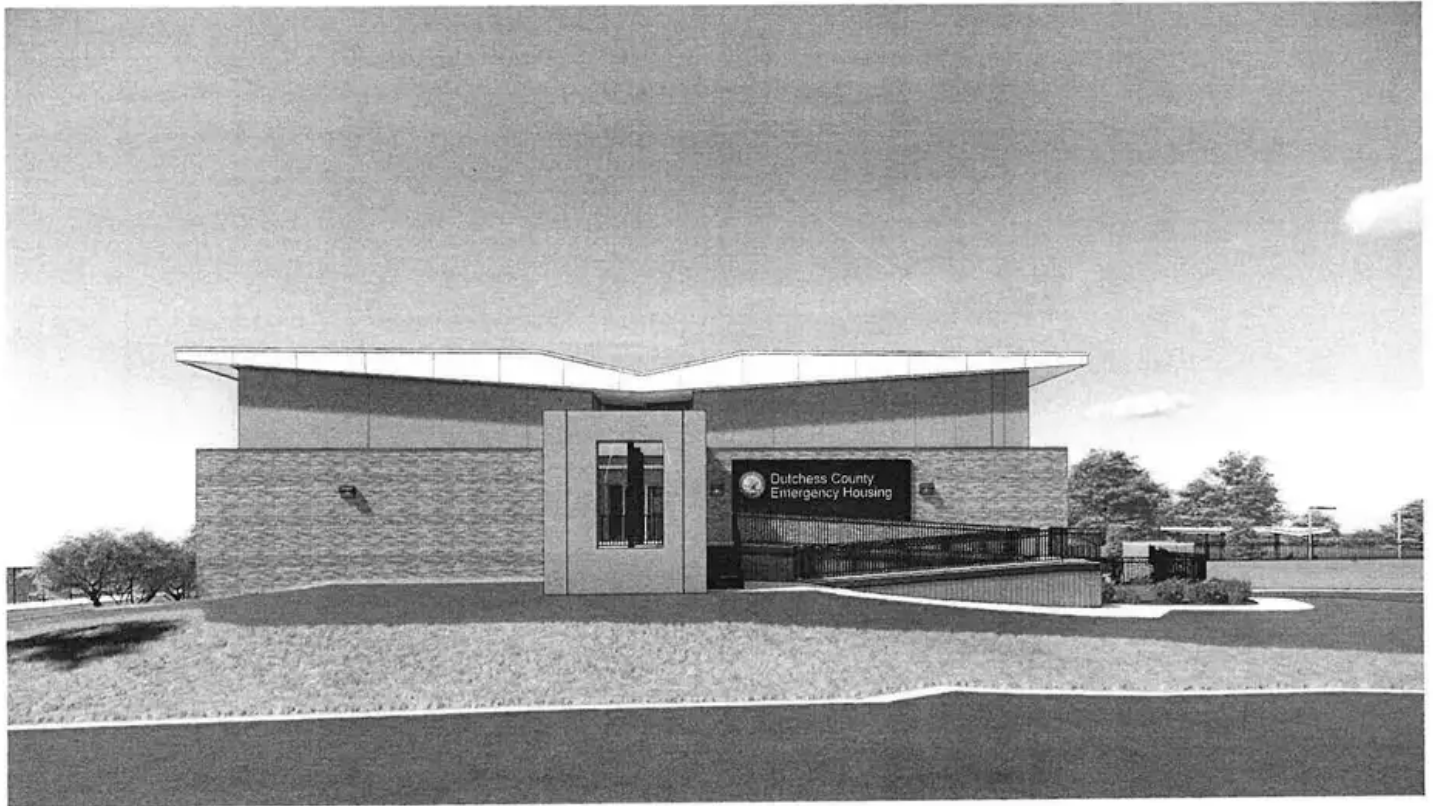
By **Phillip Pantuso**, *Staff Writer*

Updated Sep 16, 2025 3:59 p.m.



Gift Article





A rendering of the planned shelter at 26 Oakley St. in Poughkeepsie. On Tuesday, the city filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against the county seeking an injunction to prevent the shelter from being built there. Tinkelman Architecture



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POUGHKEEPSIE — The city of Poughkeepsie has filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against Dutchess County and County Executive Sue Serino, escalating a yearslong dispute over the placement of a homeless shelter on the city's Northside.

The complaint, filed Tuesday in U.S. District Court, argues that the county's plan to site a 99-bed shelter for single adults at 26 Oakley St. in the city's Fifth Ward would reinforce racial segregation and place an unfair burden on neighborhoods that

already host a disproportionate share of social services. The complaint alleges violations of the federal Fair Housing Act, state human rights law and local zoning rules, and seeks an injunction blocking the county from moving forward with the site.

Two Northside residents, Gladys Lyles and Lisa Cummings, both Black women who live near the proposed facility, joined the city as plaintiffs.

The lawsuit traces decades of what it calls discriminatory policies in Dutchess County, from redlining and school district separation in the mid-20th century to the siting and later expansion of the county jail in the Northside neighborhood. It argues that the Oakley Street shelter would further concentrate poverty in a predominantly Black community and diminish property values, while less discriminatory alternatives — such as returning the shelter to its prior location at Hillcrest in the town of Poughkeepsie — are available.

The Hillcrest site is currently home to a transitional housing program as well as Webster House, which, until 2020, was used for the county's emergency housing. Both were operated by the nonprofit Hudson River Housing. The site is in a nonresidential area, unlike Oakley Street, and is a six-minute walk to a county-operated bus line that goes to downtown Poughkeepsie.

Poughkeepsie's Northside already hosts six of the county's seven adult emergency housing facilities. But county Republicans have said there is no alternative to the area's proximity to transit and supportive services. They also point to a \$13 million state Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance grant that will cover most of the costs.

"While the city pursues legal action, my focus remains on the people this project is serving and how helping them helps our entire community," County Executive Sue

Serino said in a statement to the Times Union. “This is about dignity, stability and hope, and I remain committed to working with all of our partners, including the city, to make sure it strengthens our community.”

MORE: [Poughkeepsie threatens legal action against county over homeless shelter](#)

Dutchess County first announced plans to purchase the Oakley Street property for an emergency shelter in 2022, [sparking immediate opposition](#) from Poughkeepsie officials and some residents. After months of negotiations, the city and county reached a compromise this spring: the facility would instead house families and single women, while the county would look elsewhere for a single-adult facility.

The revised plan was presented to the state Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, which said the \$13 million grant for the project could still apply with “proper justification,” Dutchess County Communications Director Colleen Pillus told the Times Union at the time.

But what city leaders didn’t know was that in April, county Republican leadership told Serino they would not provide the votes needed for it to pass the County Legislature, Pillus previously told the Times Union. Their concern was over where to house single men, who are the plurality of the county’s homeless population. Also of concern was the cost of building an additional shelter for them.

“Members of the legislature felt this was a piecemeal approach that limited the effectiveness of the original proposal and only further pushed out the timeline for getting the permanent facility constructed and opened for serving people in need,” Pillus said.

The following month, [Serino’s administration reneged on the compromise and reinstated the original Oakley plan](#), prompting Poughkeepsie officials to threaten the

lawsuit that arrived Tuesday.

In her statement to the Times Union on Tuesday, Serino claimed that the \$13 million state grant was “tied specifically to this location.”

“From the very beginning, our administration explored alternative solutions,” Serino said, adding: “(But) walking away from Oakley Street would mean walking away from neighbors who need stability and support, and that is something I simply cannot do.”

Pillus confirmed that the county had asked the state Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance about siting the shelter elsewhere, and that officials at the state agency said the county would have to reapply for the grant if they did.

Poughkeepsie Mayor Yvonne Flowers said the county’s reversal “implied its disregard for disadvantaged individuals and their critical housing and living needs.” Common Council Chair Da’Ron Wilson added that the county’s actions “reinforce segregation” and undermine “housing policies that expand opportunity, foster diversity and strengthen neighborhoods.”

The shelter plan is now the same as when the county voted to accept the OTDA grant last summer. Staff will be on-site 24/7, providing mental health, substance abuse and job training services — a point which residents say negates the need for proximity to other services. Case management will focus on preparing residents to live independently and securing stable housing.

Serino said the facility is “not just a shelter — it will provide services and structure that give individuals the tools to move forward,” including mental health care, workforce development and assistance finding housing.

“The goal is transition, not permanence,” Serino said. “It is also important to note that this is just one part of Dutchess County’s broader housing support network — from eviction prevention and rehousing to affordable housing development — all designed to help our neighbors achieve long-term independence ... with services all under one roof in the new supportive housing center, we will be able to amplify that success.”

Daniel Mullkoff of the Manhattan-based law firm Wang Hecker is representing the city of Poughkeepsie in the case.

Renovations at 26 Oakley St. were slated to begin next spring and the shelter is planned to open in 2027.

Dean Kopitsky contributed reporting.

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Sep 16, 2025 | Updated Sep 16, 2025 3:59 p.m.



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