

Madison's first federal-funded storm shelter for a mobile home park to open



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Until now, severe weather could send residents of the Highland Manor mobile home park scrambling for shelter, often to the Wal-Mart parking garage on the Beltline.

But on Friday, the city and partners — using a \$1.2 million grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency — are opening a \$1.7 million storm shelter with a safe room, restrooms and adjacent

playground and parking for the community at 10 Manor Drive.

It's the first federally funded shelter for a mobile home park in the city and only the second in Dane County, following one at Bay View Heights mobile home park in the town of Dunn, officials said.

The city contributed some cost of the 6,400-square-foot shelter, which will be available for neighborhood meetings and as a rental with access to chairs and tables like any city Parks Division facility, and a total \$486,000 to also cover expenses for the playground, half basketball court and paths.

"This is definitely a good thing here," said resident Raymond Fiske, who has lived at the park for two decades.

Since 1982, Dane County has had 47 confirmed tornadoes and 320 severe thunderstorms with high winds, both the highest of any county in the state, said Sean Miller, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

Highland Manor has about 360 improved sites and more than 450 residents, said Julie Morter, homeowners' association treasurer. The shelter, with precast concrete sides, a reinforced membrane roof, safety guards for doors and windows and no basement, can withstand 250 mph winds and "gives a lot of assurance," Morter said. "So many people are so thankful."

Mayor Paul Soglin, Ald. Sheri Carter, 14th District, parks superintendent Eric Knepp and others will help celebrate the opening of the facility with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 11 a.m. Friday.

"This facility provides not only a safe haven for Highland Manor residents in a storm but also a neighborhood gathering space," Soglin said in a statement. "The partnership

between the city, the federal government through FEMA, and the neighborhood has been marvelous and I couldn't be more pleased this facility is complete and operational."

Carter said, "The collaboration between all the entities involved in bringing this shelter from concept to reality is testament of recognizing a need and providing a solution."

A group of volunteers will monitor National Weather Service reports and be able to open the shelter if there is a tornado watch for the county, said James Whitney, a city architect. Doors will automatically open when Dane County emergency sirens sound for a tornado warning, he said.