



City of Bellingham
210 Lottie Street
Bellingham, WA 98225

MEMORANDUM

TO: CITY COUNCIL
FROM: BLAKE LYON, PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR
CC: MAYOR SETH FLEETWOOD
SUBJECT: RESOLUTION EXEMPTING THE INTERIM EMERGENCY SHELTER FROM STATE BUILDING CODE REQUIREMENTS
DATE: NOVEMBER 15, 2022

YWCA of Bellingham, a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization, is proposing to operate a temporary shelter at the existing First Presbyterian Church Building located at 1031 North Garden Street in Bellingham, Washington. The use of the subject facility for a temporary shelter is permitted and exempt from temporary shelter regulations per BMC 20.15.100.A.2, which exempts, "Temporary accommodations for people experiencing homelessness that are within a church building and accessory in nature to the primary religious use of the church building, provided the managing agency demonstrates to the city that the portion of the church building used to accommodate people experiencing homelessness meets city building and fire codes, or obtains an exemption from state building codes per RCW [19.27.042](#)."

The building is not in full compliance with all of the requirements of the building code for this proposed temporary shelter use. However, compliance with the deficient requirements may be waived provided that the building is found to be safe, is used to provide housing for indigent persons and meets the requirements of RCW 19.27.042.

The Building Official and Fire Marshal have determined that the building poses no threat to human life, health or safety. Staff has determined that all other applicable criteria established in RCW 19.27.042 have been met. The adoption of the proposed resolution will allow the operation of the interim shelter during winter months without strict compliance with the building code, while still being safe.

For more information pertaining to the interim shelter operations proposal from YWCA of Bellingham, please refer to attachment to this memo.

Attachment

YWCA BELLINGHAM AND FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

2022 WINTER SHELTER PROPOSAL

SUMMARY (INCLUDING MISSION AND STATEMENT OF INTENT):

The number of individuals experiencing homelessness in Whatcom County continues to exceed the capacity of the county's emergency shelters. Currently, 162 homeless women are on the housing pool waiting list and are completely unsheltered. Homelessness is a public crisis at all times. However, during the coldest, wettest, and darkest months of the year, the danger of exposure associated with unsheltered homelessness enters the realm of a true emergency.

The YWCA and First Presbyterian Church propose to operate a small winter shelter with eight beds for women. The shelter will be on-site at the First Presbyterian Church at 1031 N. Garden Street in their detached "commons building." It will operate seasonally (not weather-dependent) from mid-November of 2022 through the end of April 2023. In addition to providing safety and refuge, YWCA staff will provide supportive services, including assistance accessing community resources to increase the likelihood that shelter residents exit to stable housing at the end of the season rather than returning to homelessness as the weather improves.

The YWCA Bellingham is the managing and sponsoring agency for this proposal. The YWCA Bellingham is part of a national network of organizations with the shared mission of ending racism, empowering women, and promoting peace, justice, and freedom for all. The YWCA Bellingham offers affordable housing, emergency shelter, case management, economic empowerment programs, and social justice programming.

YWCA PROGRAM EXPERIENCE:

Since 1907, the YWCA Bellingham has provided safe housing for women. Through its 114-year history, the organization has adapted programs to meet the community's needs. Helping homeless and low-income women through housing and support services has always been at the core.

In Whatcom County, the YWCA is the only organization that provides emergency shelter and supported long-term housing to single women. At the YWCA, homeless women not only find shelter; they also find connection, hope, and the support they need to achieve stability and quality of life that prevents future homelessness. The YWCA Housing Program's goal is to end the cycle of poverty and homelessness by helping women gain the support and skills they need to find and thrive in permanent housing.

OPERATIONS PLAN

Overview:

YWCA will make eight shelter beds available nightly from the shelter's opening (mid-November) through its close at the end of April 2023. On-site supportive services will be offered, although participation with YWCA staff will not be mandatory for women to access the shelter. Support Services include assisting residents in finding food, clothing, income, medical and mental health care, and skills for budgeting and successful renting.

YWCA will operate a continuous-stay shelter, whereby guests retain a shelter spot for the duration of the season, provided they follow shelter policies and guidelines, including minimizing community disruption, treating other guests and their possessions respectfully, and observing quiet hours. Guests will be referred through the Whatcom Homeless Service Center's Coordinated Entry system. The shelter, located at 1031 N. Garden Street, will continually open for residents. The YWCA office for support services is open from 9a-5p regular business days with 24-hour on-call support 365 days per year.

Key Staff

The program is supported by several key staff as follows:

Karen Burke, CEO – responsible for program development, funding, oversight, and policies.

Theresa Hohman, Housing Program Director – responsible for day-to-day program management, including intakes, client support, and resident adherence to program guidelines.

Jeff Griffin, Maintenance Manager – responsible for building and site maintenance and repairs and for getting the building ready for residents.

Site Management

The site is located in the direct vicinity of the YWCA and its management and support staff. The site will be operated as part of the housing programs of the YWCA. YWCA staff is on-site from 9-5p and on an on-call rotation for immediate response 365 days a year.

Facility Maintenance:

The YWCA Maintenance Manager and the First Presbyterian Church Staff will maintain the facility.

Occupancy Policies:

The program will operate as one of the established YWCA emergency housing programs. Residents must sign a housing agreement outlining program rules and expectations.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Residents must keep the names and personal information of other residents confidential.

GUESTS

For the privacy and safety of all residents, guests are not allowed at the YWCA, including outside in the smoking area, parking lot gardens, and lawns.

NON-VIOLENCE

All residents and staff of the YWCA deserve emotional and physical safety. Physical violence is not allowed, and residents must agree not to threaten, yell or be aggressive when interacting with others, including staff members. Weapons are not allowed at the YWCA.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Case Managers are available to help residents resolve interpersonal conflicts.

DIVERSITY AND RESPECT

The YWCA celebrates diversity. Residents must agree to refrain from discriminatory, disrespectful, or disapproving language when talking to or about anyone's religion, heritage, race, ethnicity, political beliefs, disability, gender expression, or any other reason. Residents should not inappropriately share or try to convince others to follow religious, political, or personal beliefs.

BOUNDARIES AND PRIVACY

Residents must agree to respect personal space and property by not taking anything that does not belong to them, not entering private rooms or alcoves without permission, and not entering non-public floors where they do not reside.

SMOKING AND FIRE

Smoking is allowed only in the designated smoking area. The YWCA does not allow candles, incense, or similar flammable items.

CLUTTER

The YWCA furnishes Rooms and Alcoves. Residents may not bring additional furniture, clothing, housewares, or personal items that do not fit into the provided furniture or under the bed into the YWCA. The floor space must remain open to allow for movement, safe entry, and exits for emergency personnel. Residents must keep items away from heaters. Case managers can help residents with organization, clutter, and obtaining storage as needed.

ROOM SANITATION

Food must be kept sealed and refrigerated or otherwise sealed and stored safely. Dirty dishes and food waste may not be kept in rooms. Residents must remove garbage and clean floors and bedding regularly. Case Managers will guide residents to maintain a sanitary room.

CHORES

The YWCA asks residents to keep common areas clean and sanitary by picking up food, trash, and personal items and sanitizing surfaces after use. Residents are assigned rotating "chores" that are necessary to maintain a safe and clean living environment. In addition, case Managers are available to work with residents who have difficulty completing assigned chores.

NOISE AND QUIET HOURS

Residents must agree to keep noise to a minimum at all times. Quiet hours are between 10p-8a. There is no formal curfew, but residents should be quiet and respectful when exiting and entering the building during quiet hours.

RESPECTING NEIGHBORS

Residents should stay off the neighbors' lawns, driveways, and parking lots, including the church lawn and parking areas.

Residents should not use the alley, neighbors' driveways, or sidewalks to have visitors.

ILLEGAL DRUGS, ALCOHOL, AND MARIJUANA

Many residents at the YWCA have found that addiction has contributed to their homelessness.

Residents should respect those who are maintaining sobriety.

Residents may not bring prescription medication not prescribed to them, illegal drugs, marijuana products, or alcohol into the building or the YWCA grounds. Residents who have prescriptions for marijuana may not smoke it in the building or on the property. They should refrain from administering their prescription in front of others.

Residents may not be under the influence of non-prescription medication, illegal drugs, marijuana products, or alcohol in the building or on the YWCA grounds.

Case management and Housing Goals

Residents are expected to work with a case manager to eliminate barriers and gain skills to obtain and maintain permanent housing.

NIGHTS AWAY

Residents should notify their case manager if they will be away for a night. Residents who are away without notice or contact for more than 72 hours may be assumed to have left the YWCA Housing Program and abandoned their property. Abandoned personal property will be packed and stored for 30 days and then disposed of as deemed appropriate.

PETS, EMOTIONAL SUPPORT, AND COMPANION ANIMALS

Because animals, including emotional support and companion animals, limit housing options, residents may not obtain animals while residing at the YWCA.

Support Services

The goal of the YWCA Housing Program is to provide a safe environment where women can live while they obtain the skills and support they need to not only find and but to thrive in permanent housing. All residents receive intensive case management services with the following outcome goals:

Outcomes:

Help residents obtain basic needs and ongoing financial resources

Help residents obtain health insurance and primary medical care

Help residents find mental health care and substance use disorder services as needed

Help residents find healthy community and social connections

Help residents develop skills for responsible tenancy.

Neighborhood Plan

The YWCA has provided shelter in the neighborhood since 1907. Several multifamily units populate the neighborhood, and we work together to ensure safety and peaceful living. This program is a joint project between neighbors.

Records Procedures

Applicants are referred through the Whatcom Homeless Service Center. The YWCA also completes an intake interview to:

ensure that YWCA has all necessary information on the applicant;

identify and sign necessary releases of information;

identify the applicant's barriers to housing;

identify and address the applicant's immediate needs;

identify the applicant's general long-term goals;

And verify that the applicant fully understands and can comply with the Housing Agreement.

The YWCA keeps resident files containing signed intake forms, release of information and informed consent, confidentiality agreements, key logs, resident vehicle information, housing agreement, move-in checklist, housing plans and goals, and case management notes. Resident files are kept in locked file cabinets with access limited to appropriate staff.

The YWCA keeps resident files for seven years past the residents' exit date.

DESCRIPTION OF TRANSIT, PEDESTRIAN, AND BICYCLE ACCESS

Bellingham Transit Authority is accessible from the site, with bus stops within one block. Additionally, paratransit can access the entrance to the alley easily. The location is in a multifamily neighborhood with sidewalks and bike lanes for easy and safe pedestrian and bicycle access.

WAIVER ON MINIMUM SQUARE FOOTAGE PER BED

The YWCA is asking to house eight women in an 1140 sq foot building. The building includes a common area, sleeping areas, a basic kitchen facility (for warming and refrigerating food), and two bathroom facilities. In addition, residents will access the YWCA's shower, laundry, and larger kitchen areas. The additional accessible space adds to the usable square footage. The additional residents do not pose an additional impact on the neighborhood.