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Shalom Center to house temporary overnight warming shelter during winter months

KENOSHA – An emergency overnight warming shelter will be provided this winter under a partnership forged between Kenosha County, the City of Kenosha and the Shalom Center.

Under the arrangement, the Shalom Center will offer 10 emergency beds, to be reserved for chronically homeless individuals who might otherwise not qualify for Shalom Center shelter services.

The county is reallocating resources to provide funding to the Shalom Center for the additional programming. This temporary arrangement will begin this month and continue through April 2018.

“We are leveraging our existing resources to help Kenosha County residents during the winter,” County Executive Jim Kreuser said.

While the Shalom Center opened a new, 72-bed shelter in September in a converted office building at 4314 39th Ave., this came a few months after the closing of First Step Services, a low-barrier “wet shelter” that accepted individuals with alcohol and other drug addictions.

Under the new emergency shelter arrangement, the 10 additional beds to be added for the winter at the Shalom Center would be reserved for people currently on the streets of Kenosha. These individuals would be required to adhere to the same rules of behavior and conduct as those currently taking shelter at the Shalom Center.

“This expansion of services will be helpful to the community,” said Mayor John Antaramian. “We’re thankful to the Shalom Center for its willingness to help us address this issue.”

Those invited to shelter at the Shalom Center would be allowed to stay there 24 hours a day and would receive access to public transportation several times a week to move about the city as needed.

Provided the 10 temporary emergency beds at the Shalom Center are filled by people who wish to be there and follow the organization's rules and regulations, about 10 additional unsheltered homeless people would remain in the community, estimates indicate.

"It is our hope that other community partners will step forward with solutions to help meet the needs of this population," said John Jansen, director of the Kenosha County Department of Human Services.

The shelter efforts are part of a continuum of housing programs in place to prevent homelessness in the community, Jansen noted.

At present, 138 people are housed in 73 units throughout the city in transitional, rapid or permanent housing funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Kenosha Human Development Services administers 64 of these units; Women and Children's Horizons oversees nine.

Jansen said transitional and rapid housing units offer 18 months of housing for people who meet the definition of homeless, while permanent housing is a longer-term commitment focused on the chronic unsheltered population. Jansen said while there are currently 10 permanent housing sites available, Kenosha Human Development Services is seeking funding for 15 more, which would help to address much of the population now in need of emergency winter shelter services.

"We already have a strong network of agencies working to address homelessness in our community, and this adds another resource to assist them," Jansen said.

Lynn Biese-Carroll, executive director of the Shalom Center, thanked the city and county for its assistance with the temporary emergency shelter.

"The staff and Board of Directors of the Shalom Center is concerned about the well-being of all those in need," Biese-Carroll said. "We are pleased that with the city and county's help, we are in a position to offer additional temporary assistance over the harsh winter months, allowing everyone time to find a permanent solution."

"Safety for all of our residents is the primary concern," said Tamarra Coleman, director of programs and operations for the Shalom Center. "We will look to our current sheltered residents to collaboratively work and support our new overflow clients with the goal that we can continue to maintain order and safety, while providing a service we all agree is much needed."

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