




MEMORANDUM

December 27, 2012

TO: Mayor Weitkunat and City Council Members

TH: Darin Atteberry, City Manager   
Bruce Hendee, Chief Sustainability Officer 

FM: Joe Frank, Director of Social Sustainability 

RE: Sheltering the Homeless in Extreme Weather Conditions

The purpose of this memorandum is to update the City Council as to what is being done to shelter homeless people during extreme weather conditions (i.e., temperatures below 20 degrees or temperatures below 30 degrees and snowing).

**Temporary Demand Can Be Handled by the Existing Shelters**

Before Christmas, a planning team composed of area homeless agencies, homeless persons, and City staff from the Department of Social Sustainability, met to discuss the need for and implementation of a temporary winter shelter for homeless persons. Three subcommittees were formed: location/facility; operations/management; and, funding.

After much discussion and observation by the "operations/management team" consisting of Glenn Good, Director of Catholic Charities' "The Mission" located at 460 Linden Center Drive, Jim Carmack, Director to the Fort Collins' "Rescue Mission" located at 316 Jefferson Street, and City staff, there is general agreement that the existing homeless shelters most likely have the capacity to handle the volume of homeless during inclement weather.

The Catholic Charities operates "The Mission," a permanent shelter for 18 men; 6 women; and four family rooms; an emergency "overflow" shelter with a capacity of 28 beds for men; and four beds for women or families; and a 16 beds for up to 16 male veterans. The "Mission" is a dry facility (residents must pass a breathalyzer to enter). The Rescue Mission has space for about 20 women and 50 men. The Rescue Mission is "damp" (no breathalyzer). In addition, several area churches are providing housing for homeless families.

During the week before Christmas, when the weather turned cold and Fort Collins experienced its first real cold/snow of winter, Catholic Charities had to turn away one person because of a capacity issue, but the Rescue Mission turned away no one. On Christmas eve, Catholic Charities, had just 20 people in overflow, short of their 28 capacity; on Christmas night they had 29, with one person bedded down on the dining room floor. On December 26, the Rescue Mission was close to full on the men's side and had room for another six women on the floor. No one was turned away from either facility.

With the additional “emergency capacity” described below, the shelter staff is comfortable that the needed overflow space is available in the existing two facilities. Shelter staff and City staff will continue to monitor the demand for overflow space. If demand exceeds capacity, the third site option described below will be further explored.

### **PFA Approval for Limited Overflow Space**

Last week, Shawn McGaffin, Assistant Fire Marshal of Inspection Services with the Poudre Fire Authority (PFA), conducted inspections of both homeless shelters to determine where additional overflow homeless people could safely stay on the occasions where demand exceeded facility capacities. After his inspections, Assistant Fire Marshall McGaffin has given written permission for the Catholic Charities to accept about 10 more homeless people to sleep in their dining area, provided they meet the shelter’s policies regarding alcohol use (i.e., they must be “dry”). The Rescue Mission facility is much older and is in not great shape and has only very limited additional capacity for handling overflow. The PFA staff offered advice and fire/smoke detectors to make the existing facility and residents safer.

There is a lot of commitment by both facilities to not turn anyone away from having a warm place to sleep (some may be turned out/away for bad behavior which is not tolerated in either facility). And, there is a lot of good communication between the staffs of the two facilities. Catholic Charities may need to add one staff person to handle the temporary bad weather overflow, the cost of which should be covered through the emergency funding that has been raised (see funding below).

### **Potential Use of a Third Site for Overflow**

The primary strategy is to maximize the capacities of the existing shelters first; only when the temperatures get too cold and/or it is snowing and demand exceeds existing capacities would there be the need for a temporary overflow third facility. There has been a lot of thought around program management and how a third overflow shelter would be run. Some of the parameters would include, it would be a damp facility; operation would be limited to between 10:00 p.m. – 6:00 a.m.; blankets only; and, no other services. The temporary facility would need to be run by an experienced operator, with liability insurance, etc. To date no agency has agreed to accept management of the temporary facility. One very good person who has worked full time at the Denver Rescue Mission Harvest Farm in Wellington, has agreed to staff the facility, if needed.

The Community of Christ Church at 220 East Oak Street has shown willingness to consider making their gym available for use as an overflow shelter, if needed. The Christ Church was used for this purpose a few years ago. There is also available space in a City owned property at 212-218 West Mountain. There are zoning issues with both locations which would require City Council approval as was done for overflow facilities with the Knights of Columbus Building/St. Joseph’s Church last year. There is still a lot of logistics that would need to be worked out for a third site option to work. At this time, further work on this option has been suspended pending the success of the existing missions to meet the demand for overflow. Over the long term, a City staff team will be looking at possible land use code options for temporary shelters.

### **Funding**

Funding is needed to cover the anticipated expenses of a temporary homeless shelter for extra staffing, building rental, utilities, etc. Bill Kneeland (Homeward 2020 board member) has secured \$10,000 in

financial assistance from the City (\$5000 – Source: Community Opportunities Fund), and United Way and some private individuals (\$5000). The estimated need is \$15,000, so funding is still \$5,000 short. United Way has agreed to manage the funds.