



Office of Mayor Charlie Hales
City of Portland

Temporary Shelter at SFC Jerome F. Sears Army Reserve Center

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why is the City using the Sears Building as a temporary shelter?

The Mayor and City Council declared a Housing State of Emergency in September 2015, because it was clear that the city does not have enough affordable housing and shelter bed space to accommodate our homeless neighbors. The existing tools the City has at its disposal are not enough to accelerate the building of more housing stock or opening of more shelter beds, and the declaration of a State of Emergency allows the City to move faster in siting, building and funding.

The Sears Building was deeded to the City to be used as an emergency management center, which will require a roughly \$12 million expenditure over time. In the meantime, the facility is empty. The Mayor believes that “if we have an empty building that’s heated, lighted and secure, it’s unconscionable to have thousands of people sleeping outside every night.”

How long is the City using the Sears Building as a temporary shelter?

The building will serve as a shelter for only six months. The Federal Government has been clear that the building was deeded to the City for use as an emergency management center only. While the work begins to convert the building to that facility, immediate improvements will also allow the building to be occupied as a shelter, and the Federal Government said that can occur for no more than six months before people must vacate.

When will the Sears Building Temporary Shelter open?

The Sears Building Temporary Shelter will open as soon as possible, with a goal of opening on Thanksgiving Day. The weather is turning and the rainy season has begun. Soon the temperatures will dip, and we will enter the worst time for Portlanders to be outside, so there is urgency in getting the space ready. The City has approved funding for both initial capital improvements and for shelter operations through its Budget Monitoring Process this past week.

What population will the Sears Building accommodate as a temporary shelter?

While there are roughly 1,800 people sleeping outside every night, there has been a particularly significant increase in certain highly vulnerable populations, including unsheltered women. The Sears Building Temporary Shelter will first seek to shelter single women, but if the shelter operator

believes that it can be done — given the layout of the building and its staffing capacity — they may invite women and their partners to stay as well. There are currently no facility-based shelter options for couples, and some women will only come inside if their partner accompanies them. Finally, if the shelter operator believes there is capacity to offer space to our homeless neighbors currently living in the immediate neighborhood around the Sears Building, that is possible as well.

The Sears Building, however, will not shelter women who are in imminent danger of domestic violence; there are specific domestic violence shelters in Portland that are secure and run by trained domestic violence staff.

The Sears Building also will not shelter kids or families with kids, as there are other options that currently serve those populations, some of which have a “no turn away” policy.

What influence does the neighborhood have to include more families in the shelter?

This shelter will serve adults only, not families with children. Multnomah County maintains a no turn-away family shelter, so any family seeking shelter has access to it. That is not the case with adult women, 550 of whom are unsheltered on nights when every women’s shelter bed in the community is full. The maximum occupancy for the Sears shelter is set by fire code and by the capacity to adequately staff the facility.

How many people will be sheltered at the Sears Building?

In order to comply with the fire code and to create an easily manageable system, the City is planning for no more than 150 shelter guests at any one time. If a person would like to stay for longer than one night, her bed space would be saved.

Will the Sears Building Temporary Shelter be open 24 hours a day?

The Sears Building will be open only at night, opening at 7 p.m. and closing at 7 a.m. Because the Sears Building will be used only temporarily as a shelter, it would be very difficult to operate a 24-hour shelter, which would require 24-hour provider care, meals, and other more “permanent” amenities. By limiting the hours to overnight only, guests can still avail themselves of provider options and food service downtown, and not rely on in-shelter service.

The operator sets clear expectations with guests about their activities in the immediate vicinity of shelters. There is an expectation that guests do not spend excessive time in the neighborhood and respect neighbors and the community. The operator will voice an ongoing expectation to guests that drug and alcohol use, aggressive behavior, and other behaviors that are disruptive to the community are unacceptable.

How will people get to the Sears Building Temporary Shelter?

The Sears Building has some transit challenges, with the closest bus stop roughly a half-mile away. That is a limiting factor for many potential shelter guests. The City is working on a transportation plan that will involve a shuttle service with several central city pick-up and drop-off sites, with pick-up in the evening and drop-off in the morning. It’s expected that the vast majority of shelter guests will be transported by this system.

**Once people are dropped off for the night,
is there any guarantee they will all get on the shuttle buses and depart the next morning?**

While no one will be required to take the shuttle back downtown, guests will be strongly encouraged to use the shuttle and will be expected not to hang out on or near the property when it is closed.

**Why are people being bused in from
their own home base to a neighborhood that is primarily a family neighborhood?**

The people who will use this shelter come from all parts of our community. It is very difficult to find locations anywhere in the city that can be used as emergency shelter. As a result, we're often not able to offer homeless people shelter in the locations that they would prefer or would be most convenient for them. We are, however, actively looking to expand shelter capacity throughout the community, including in Northeast, close-in and outer Southeast, St. Johns, and downtown.

**Will the homeless be able to line up at the door
to get a room for the night or will the shelter only be available to people who are bused in?**

The vast majority of guests will come by shuttle. In order to reduce queuing and a line, priority access will be given to those who arrive by shuttle. While it is possible to arrive by public transit, guests will be directed to take the shuttle to guarantee a space in the shelter.

Will the Sears Building Temporary Shelter be staffed?

Yes. Currently Transition Projects, Inc., one of the city's largest emergency shelter providers, is planning on being the shelter operator. They will have staff in the Sears Building at all times that shelter guests are present, and will manage the space. The shelter will be adequately staffed with an experienced onsite manager, a program lead, and trained shelter staff.

During the day, when the space is not being used as shelter, it won't be staffed; presumably, however, it will be occupied by construction crews working on the capital improvements to convert the building into its long-term emergency management center function.

Will Transition Projects be providing "wrap around" services to the people at the shelter?

This is a temporary emergency shelter. Many wrap-around services will be provided either by TPI or other community-based agencies at their other program locations.

What improvements will be happening at the Sears Building?

In order to open the doors as a temporary shelter, very little construction is required. The facility will be cleaned, the fire system tested, and some improvements will be done, including the conversion of the front door into an ADA-accessible one; the construction of a few new windows in some of the rooms; and potentially an increase in the number of toilets and showers.

While the space is being used as shelter, more ADA improvements will likely occur, including the construction of an elevator and the build-out of a commercial kitchen.

**What fraction of this cost
would be unnecessary for its use as an emergency response center?**

At this time we have not identified any work that is required that would not be needed to operate the Emergency Response Center.

**What would be the additional cost of removing or altering
any features that were be inappropriate for an emergency response center?**

The identified work is mainly ADA, HVAC, Electrical, Lighting, Plumbing, Fire/Life Safety, Painting and cleaning, all of which will be necessary for use both as a temporary shelter and for the emergency response center.

What is the cost of preparing the building for use as a homeless shelter?

The scope of work and costs are still being developed. We are working to make sure that the work, repair and any alterations to the building support the ultimate intended use of the building as the Westside Emergency Center. However, City Council just approved a \$1 million expenditure for capital improvements to the building, as well as a \$1.26 million expenditure for shelter operations, of which roughly half would be used for Sears operations.

What will happen at the end of six months?

The goal is to work with shelter guests over the six months to move as many as possible into permanent housing. The City and the County, in coordination with A Home for Everyone (the region's housing and homelessness coordination board) are exploring many options for new shelter facilities, and during the six months of operation at the Sears Building, will likely have created many more bed spaces. Further, many faith-based and community groups have already expressed an interest in creating temporary and permanent shelter in their facilities.

Is the City guaranteeing that the shelter will be closed at the end of six months?

Yes.

Is the City going to provide additional security for the people who are living there?

The shelter will be professionally staffed according well established best practices standards for insuring the safety of all guests.

**Is the City going to provide more policing
for the community, including the nearby West Hills Christian School?**

The Portland Police Bureau will coordinate closely with the shelter provider and address issues that arise. The shelter will open at 7 p.m., after the school closes, and will close at 7 a.m., with the expectation that residents will be transported back downtown while the shelter is closed.

Will the homeless shelter hire private security?

No. The shelter will be adequately staffed. If issues arise that require additional support, including security, funding would be found to provide it.

How can the neighborhood stop the Sears Armory from being used as a homeless shelter?

Barring unforeseen circumstances, the Sears shelter will open Thanksgiving. There is a strong commitment and plan in place to insure that it will not have adverse impacts on the neighborhood while it is in operation, and there is a firm deadline to close the shelter after 6 months.

If this is really an emergency, wouldn't it be more cost effective to put up tents in all the city parks to shelter all of the 1,800 homeless, like what is done after earthquakes?

In this case no. Each tent camping location would require staffing to be properly managed, and there would be costs associated with the maintenance and provisioning of each site (porta potties, cooking facilities, etc). The Sears center can serve 150 people in one location and has all of the necessary amenities, including bathrooms, showers, heat/light, and common spaces. The improvements needed to make the Sears center usable as shelter are minimal and all serve the longer-term use as an emergency management facility. Even if the costs were marginally greater, however, being able to offer vulnerable homeless women the safety and security of an indoor shelter option, rather than tents, especially going into the rainiest and coldest months of the year, would be worth the additional investment.

How can I volunteer at the Sears Building Temporary Shelter?

One of the best ways to show our less fortunate neighbors compassion is to volunteer. By doing so, you not only provide valuable resources, but also getting to know shelter guests is one of the best ways to begin to understand the challenges our homeless neighbors face. Additionally, our homeless neighbors can always use blankets, coats and other clothing, as well as toiletries and other amenities.

When the shelter is closer to being opened, the City will provide contact information for those wanting to volunteer.

For more information, contact:

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