

# Warming center: A handful of people have been excluded for the season because of their behavior

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The Helping Hands shelter, with its focus on re-entry, would be more stringent in its requirements. Astoria still needs a place like the warming center, Evans said.

“There is a community of people who will not be able to access our facility in inclement weather,” he said. “So those organizations need to happen still.”

### Midseason review

Only two neighbors showed up to ask questions and express concerns at the warming center’s midseason neighborhood meeting Saturday.

“It’s going a lot better this year,” said Sue Allen Clarke, who lives on Franklin Avenue.

Clarke attended to make sure that people who came to the center and then caused major disruptions were excluded in the future, she said. Dan Parkison, president of the warming center board, assured her this was now the case.

Cathy Cruikshank, who lives in the Illahee Apartments across the street from the church, came to talk about two incidents outside the shelter. In December, she saw a group gathered around a man who was too drunk to stand, trying to help him inside the center, she said. In early January, she had been catcalled as she walked by the center.

“We’re low barrier but zero tolerance,” Parkison said, adding, “We are much quicker and stricter on exclusion policies.”

This season, staff have excluded a handful of people for the entire season because of unruly or uncooperative behavior, Parkison said.

When the warming center sought a one-year conditional use permit to operate out of the church last summer, the board was asked to develop an agreement with the neighborhood and the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association. The agreement outlined commitments from the center, including regular trash pickup, patrols of the church parking lot to make sure people aren’t camping in their cars on nights when the center is open, and regular meetings at the beginning, middle and end of the season.

The center struggled to fill out its roster of volunteers this winter and has been forced to close several nights when it could have been open. Parkison said the board is developing a list of “last resort” people they can call if they are short just one person.

### ‘Rules are good’

Every night the warming center is open now, the homeless people who come, in addition to getting a meal and place to sleep, hear a talk about respecting the neighborhood, Parkison said. They also help volunteers pick up trash and dog poop around the church grounds.

“This year, it’s a jail without bars, it’s so strict,” said Edward Gates Sr., who has lived in Clatsop County for four years and has been homeless off and on throughout that period. But, to him, the new, stricter conditions are a good thing.

Other people who have stayed at the shelter this winter agreed. One woman commented, “Hotels have rules, homes have rules. Rules are good. They keep people safe.”

Sean Fitzpatrick, who serves on the Astoria Planning Commission and is one of the owners of the Illahee Apartments across the street from the church, did not attend the meeting Saturday. During the conditional use permit hearings, Fitzpatrick recused himself from discussion and vote so he could participate as a member of the public. He supports the center’s mission, he said, but believes it is a burden on the neighborhood.

In a phone interview Saturday, he said the operation is smoother than it was last winter. He still has concerns, though. He complained to the city about urine and feces around the church at a City Council meeting in early January.



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

LEFT: People living near the Astoria Warming Center have reported fewer problems this year. Volunteers Cheryl Paul and Ami Kreider organize donations before opening the facility.

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