



R.J. Marx/The Astorian

A building on S. Roosevelt will open as a warming center on Dec. 1.

Church: ‘They deserve better than to sleep in a tent by the river’

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Right now, the organization is allowing volunteers to work in the kitchen. “Looking at what’s going on right now, I think that’s fairly safe,” Delaney said. “And it’s one person at a time; we’re not having a whole crew of people coming in.”

The warming center may try to design volunteer roles for people from both the housed and unhoused population — opportunities for people who use the emergency shelter to “feel more ownership of the space,” Delaney said.

The center requires that all staff and volunteers be vaccinated against the coronavirus to protect workers and guests. “We’re just trying to prioritize everybody’s safety,” Delaney said.

Last year, social distancing measures cut down the shelter’s guest capacity to just under 30. Even with the reduction in beds, the center never maxed out, according to Teresa Barnes, the executive director.

The warming center is low-barrier: As long as someone can come in unassisted and isn’t behaving unruly or experiencing a serious medical episode, that person can stay.

In the spring, the state passed a new law that removed some operational hurdles for homeless shelters. For the warming center, this eliminated the requirement that the shelter open only when the weather becomes dangerously cold or wet.

But, because the building lacks a commercial sprinkler system and needs other upgrades, the center is still limited to a total of 90 days between mid-Novem-

ber and mid-March.

So, even though the law gave the warming center more discretion about which nights to open, in practice it changed very little. For the most part, the center will open during nights of inclement weather.

“There’s not nearly as much difference as I’d hoped there would be,” Barnes said.

The law did change one thing. The warming center, which operates in a residential area, no longer needs the good-neighbor agreement, put in place in 2017 in response to complaints about noise, loitering, littering and other nuisances.

“That being said, we’re still trying to be good neighbors,” said Barnes, who lives nearby. “We’re trying to be very thoughtful.”

The warming center will monitor behavior as if the agreement is still in place, Danielle Hall, the board president, said. Quiet hours will be enforced, litter and pet waste will continue to be cleaned up, and people will have to be respectful of the neighbors.

Hall said people can reach out to her or Barnes if they want to raise concerns.

In a county with many hundreds of homeless people and few resources, it is difficult to come up with solutions that make everyone happy, Hall said. “But we are trying to come up with solutions to really protect people and give them some stability,” she said.

It is hard, for example, for someone to hold down a job when they don’t have a place to take a shower.

“These are just people. They are our fellow Astorians,” she said. “And they deserve better than to sleep in a tent by the river.”

Seaside: ‘Homelessness is a community issue’

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An overnight staff member will be assisted by one or two volunteers to oversee the shelter. Men will be separated from women and children, Evans said. A pet policy has yet to be determined.

Data will be gathered to determine future needs. “Whoever comes in, we’ll take their name and their information,” Evans said. “We want to grab demographics. We want to hear their story, and then take that data and collect it so we can understand the people that we’re trying to serve.”

The park district will work with the shelter to provide vouchers for shower access, said Skyler Archibald, the park district’s executive director.

There is no financial contribution estimate at this time, Archibald added, other than

‘ONCE THE (EVICTION) MORATORIUM IS LIFTED, THE FACE OF HOMELESSNESS CHANGES AGAIN.’

Alan Evans | Helping Hands

the \$3 shower vouchers.

The park district is assessing the best way to provide food, Archibald said. “The hope is to provide a box lunch for dinner for folks at the shelter and then something for them to eat on their way out in the morning,” he said.

Viviana Matthews, the executive director of Clatsop Community Action, asked for community support.

“Homelessness is a community issue, and we all need and want to work together to provide the best services possible for the unhoused in our community,” she said. “I am

thrilled that we are very close to making the warming and navigation center in Seaside a reality, as last year we were not able to achieve our goal.

“I am asking and hoping that the community will support this collaborative effort to serve our unsheltered population.”

The news on the warming center came as the city reviewed findings from a homelessness think tank chaired by Mayor Jay Barber and City Councilor Tita Montero.

League of Oregon Cities lobbyist Ariel Nelson pro-

vided state and legal recommendations at community forums this summer. The city hopes to reestablish a county-wide elected officials work group, which had met until 2019 but has not met since the coronavirus pandemic.

Other think tank strategies include a managed RV or car parking lot where people could stay, transitional housing and permanent housing. City actions could include a housing initiatives manager and a contract position to support the work of Clatsop County’s two homeless liaisons.

Evans said he sees the warming center as a good first step for Seaside.

“I think there have been great voices at the table,” he said. “And I think they’re in a good place because it’s going to get worse before it gets better. Once the (eviction) moratorium is lifted, the face of homelessness changes again.”

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