



AGENCY: City Council  
MEETING DATE: January 11, 2021  
DEPARTMENT: City Manager  
PRESENTED BY: Tabatha Miller  
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## AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

**TITLE:**

**Receive Report and Provide Direction to Staff on Preferred Location for the Winter Shelter from February 15, 2021 to March 31, 2021**

**ISSUE:**

On November 23, 2020, the Mendocino Coast Hospitality Center (MCHC) issued a press release with the title "Coast faces prospect of no Winter Shelter this year" (Attachment 1). The challenges of securing adequate venues, hiring staff and complying with COVID guidance were cited as reasons MCHC may not be able to operate the Winter Shelter this year.

The Ad Hoc Homelessness Committee (Councilmember Morsell-Haye, Vice Mayor Norvell and City Manager) met on Monday, November 30<sup>th</sup> to discuss the matter and solutions to the challenges faced. At a special meeting on December 7, 2020, scheduled to discuss the Winter Shelter (WS), the Committee recommended that the City Council consider appropriating \$15,000 to supplement the normal shelter wages paid and consider leasing a portion of the C.V. Starr Community Center in February and March, to serve as the Winter Shelter venue for the final two months. The City Council approved the \$15,000 to provide hazard pay of \$4.00 per hour for Winter Shelter staff. City Council discussed but did not provide direction on the venue for the Winter Shelter from February 15 to March 31, 2021 and requested that staff provide additional information and hear more from the public on the three venues.

**ANALYSIS:**

The Coast Winter Shelter provides emergency overnight shelter to the local transient population during the colder winter months. Prior to last year, the shelter was only open on those nights when the temperatures reached certain low levels and/or when rainstorms were predicted. Last year, the shelter was renamed from the Emergency Winter Shelter to the Winter Shelter and offered shelter every evening from approximately December 15 through March 15. The unique circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic extended the length the shelter operated and moved shelter residents into hotel rooms as precautions against the virus.

Typically, the Winter Shelter is hosted by faith-based organizations in Fort Bragg and the surrounding area. Each facility hosts the shelter for a two-week period under the terms set forth in a City issued Limited Term Permit (Attachment 2). By rotating the location, the participating churches and their associated neighborhoods share the burden of hosting the shelter. For the last several years, potential Winter Shelter guests were processed at the Mendocino Coast Hospitality Center during the day and if eligible placed on the "Shelter Eligibility List." Those individuals on the list would check in at the Fort Bragg Food Bank and

be transported to the hosting facility after 5:00pm. Shelter Guests were returned to the Hospitality Center no later than 8:00am the next morning.

The shutdown in March 2020 mandated that local hotels could only rent rooms to individuals providing essential services. This dropped occupancy rates locally by as much as 85-90% and provided empty rooms that could be rented to provide shelter to at-risk homeless and those who would traditionally stay in the Winter Shelter. This resolved many of the risks associated with operating congregate housing during a pandemic, where the risks are much higher for spreading COVID-19.

However, this fall the local hotels have had the opportunity to rent rooms to visitors and tourists and have remained quite full as reflected in the City's most recent Transient Occupancy Tax collection, which was up 8.4% for the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of fiscal year 2020-21 over the prior year, up 33% for October and up 10% for November. As a result, renting hotel rooms has not been a viable option this winter.

Many of the faith-based community partners' facilities do not have the additional space needed to properly meet the additional spacing needs necessitated by COVID. The other obstacle for the faith-based partners was the need to devote the space 24-7 to a shelter to meet sanitation and hygiene guidelines.

MCHC staff was able to secure two locations that could host the Winter Shelter for December through mid-February. MCHC staff approached the City with a request to rent the gymnasium located in City Hall East for the remaining winter season. Prior to COVID, the gymnasium would host recreational programs for the C.V. Starr and Mendocino Coast Recreation and Park District, the Farmer's Market during the winter and other special events throughout the year. With the exception of hosting the Mendocino County Polling Place in November, the gymnasium has remained essentially unused since mid-March.

While the size of the space and its availability was desirable for a shelter, the location itself adds to the considerable challenges our local businesses in the Central Business District (CBD) face from some in the homeless population. A number of these folks suffer from mental illness or substance abuse and can be abusive and/or scary to locals and visitors patronizing the local shops and businesses. Trash, drug paraphernalia, excrement, used clothing and discarded belongings can be left behind. Some of these individuals receive daily meal and shower services at the Hospitality House just east of the CBD and this has been associated with increased loitering in the CBD.

At a time when we have seen many small businesses close, the burden of hosting a Winter Shelter in this district may be too much to ask of our businesses. We depend on those businesses to attract visitors and support our tax collections. This is one of the reasons that the Food Bank in the Industrial District at the north end of Franklin Street was used to check in eligible shelter guests. It was away from the CBD businesses and reduced the loitering around businesses.

The second option is to lease a portion of the C.V. Starr Community Center. That facility is currently closed and a portion could be segmented off to provide the temporary shelter. However, a skeleton staff is working in the facility during the day and a few rooms have been allocated to the Fort Bragg School District to accommodate internet rooms and Driver's Education instruction. The facility is also undergoing increased maintenance and repair activities facilitated by the reduction in use.

The C.V. Starr Center is in a residential neighborhood and located next to an elementary school. However, most of the faith-based facilities are in residential neighborhoods and with proper permit and lease conditions, interference with the neighbors is minimal. Any activity at the School and District Offices to the South would happen between 8:00am and 5:00pm. The shelter hours would be limited to 5:30pm to 7:30am and shelter guests would be transported to and from the Center. Conditions contained in prior Temporary Use Permits would be included in this permit and lease to reduce the impacts to the neighborhood.

The possibility of hosting the Winter Shelter at the C.V. Starr Center has been discussed with C.V. Starr staff, who have raised several concerns. One matter is liability insurance. The Mendocino Coast Recreation & Park District, as the Center's operator, procures insurance for the facility and its recreation-associated operations. A homeless shelter is outside of that coverage. The recommendation is to require MCHC to provide proper insurance coverage for leasing a portion of the facility and to indemnify both the City and MCRPD.

A second matter is the safety and health of C.V. Starr staff. Staff are concerned with exposure to COVID-19 from Winter Shelter guests and the responsibility for proper cleaning and sanitation of the facility. Separating the times staff are in the facility and physically segregating the Winter Shelter from staff offices along with requiring MCHC to properly clean and sanitize the designated shelter space each morning will provide protection against possible spread of the virus. Additionally, the City will require MCHC to operate the Winter Shelter in compliance with the CDPH Guidance for Homeless Shelters and follow the protocols it developed for the Winter Shelter (Attachment 4 and Attachment 5).

A third option raised during the December 7, 2020 special City Council meeting is use of the MCHC facility at 101 N. Franklin Street. A number of public comments and social media posts about the shelter, questioned why this facility could not be used as the winter shelter venue. Paul Davis, the Interim Executive Director, who attended that meeting, discussed that option with the City Council. He indicated that it might be doable, but would be subject to the City's current zoning. The City Council passed an Urgency Ordinance which allowed for temporary zoning waivers during the pandemic to allow businesses to transition operations in response to the impacts of the pandemic and Stay at Home Orders. This same waiver could be applied for by MCHC in order to temporarily operate the 101 N. Franklin St. facility as a shelter for the 2020-21 winter season.

The 101 N. Franklin Street facility is serving as the intake and case management point for the WS guests. It is also serving as the check-in facility for eligible WS guests to check in and remain on site during the afternoons prior to transporting the WS location. WS guests

may be served meals or snacks during the check-period at the 101 N. Franklin Facility. Use of this facility would eliminate the need to transport shelter guests from check-in to the shelter venue, making the shelter operations more efficient.

The location within the Central Business District, in a neighborhood impacted by the services provided at the facility, does not make this an ideal location. However, none of the locations would be considered ideal. The 101 N. Franklin site receives regular complaints about loitering and other undesirable behaviors that affect the operations of the businesses in the area. This is particularly true on weekends, when the facility is not staffed.

The last option is to not approve a location for the shelter after February 15, 2021 and leave it to MCHC to find a suitable alternative location that would be approved for use by the City.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

Staff is seeking direction from City Council on its preferred location for the WS from approximately February 15 to March 31, 2021. Options provided include:

1. C.V. Starr Community Center
2. East City Hall Gymnasium
3. Hospitality Center, 101 N. Franklin Street
4. Alternative location as arranged for by MCHC

**ALTERNATIVE ACTION(S):**

1. Provide staff alternative direction regarding the Winter Shelter location.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

There is no direct fiscal impact to the City, other than staff time to facilitate a location.

**GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACT:**

The direction provided by Council by itself does not have an impact on greenhouse gas emissions. The location may have a small impact, depending on the length of trips for transporting winter shelter guests.

**CONSISTENCY:**

The assistance to MCHC is consistent with the following 2019-2027 Housing Element policies and programs.

Policy H-2.8 Emergency and Transitional Housing: Continue to support emergency shelters, transitional housing and supportive housing within the City.

Providing a City-owned facility to house a temporary Winter Shelter, increases the likelihood that the Winter Shelter will continue past February 2021. This may be the difference between having a Coast Winter Shelter the rest of the season.

Program H-2.8.2 Inter-Agency Cooperation: Continue to work with private, non-profit, County, and State agencies to provide transitional housing, supportive services and emergency housing for the homeless.

MCHC is a local non-profit that provides transitional housing, supportive services and emergency housing for the homeless. The City has a long history of supporting and encouraging MCHC to provide quality services and housing to our community. The Homelessness Ad Hoc Committee continues to work with MCHC to support providing quality services and housing in the community. Providing a venue to MCHC is consistent with this program.

**IMPLEMENTATION/TIMEFRAMES:**

A lease for use of a portion of the C.V. Starr Center or City Hall East Gymnasium would begin mid-February, but negotiations could start immediately. A final lease will be approved by the City Council at a future meeting.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. MCHC Press Release, November 23, 2020
2. Limited Term Permit WS 2019-20
3. Temporary Waiver & Special Conditions WS 2020-21
4. WS Cleaning and Sanitizing
5. MCHC COVID Outbreak Response
6. WS Comments Rec'd by CM

**NOTIFICATION:**

1. Carly Wells, MCRPD
2. Paul Davis, MCHC
3. Homeless, Notify Me subscriber list