

Press Release: for immediate release, November 23, 2020  
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## Coast faces prospect of no Winter Shelter this year

In spite of months of effort, the Coast is facing the prospect of not having a Winter Shelter to house some of the most vulnerable members of our community this winter. Mendocino Coast Hospitality Center (MCHC) in coordination with local faith-community partners have provided this invaluable service for more than a decade. While each year is a struggle to secure funding and staffing, the pandemic has created unprecedented barriers to success on every level.

The many obstacles this year have included failed efforts to find an organization to replace MCHC as the service provider for the shelter, COVID-19 restrictions, unavailability of the usual faith community facilities, a dearth of adequate or willing alternative rental facilities, a county zoning conflict and now staffing shortages with a very limited candidate field. Some of these obstacles have been overcome, but others remain.

Early in the year MCHC was informed that two of the Coast's elected officials were attempting to identify another organization that would agree to operate this year's Winter Shelter. This endeavor, while welcome, was ultimately unsuccessful. Realizing this fact and in keeping with its mission, history, and duty to the people who rely on the shelter each winter, MCHC submitted a proposal to request funding.

With funding applications in the pipeline, MCHC reached out to its faith community partners. It was clear from the beginning of the pandemic that congregate living situations are at particularly high-risk for COVID-19 transmission. One of the protocols for decreasing risk in these situations involves reducing the density of people in a given space. Thus, the size of the space needed for the winter shelter is larger this year, ruling out many of the small churches that have generously welcomed the shelter in the past. In addition, the need for the space to

be totally designated to the shelter program for the duration proved unfeasible.

With the knowledge that our previous approach was not an option, plus the new requirements and restrictions, MCHC began looking for alternative locations. A search of more than 30 locations in and around Fort Bragg yielded only two locations that fit the requirements and were willing to house a homeless shelter. However, that still means only two months with a secured venue, leaving the shelter without a location for up to two additional months. MCHC has reached out to the City of Fort Bragg to request the use of the old Rec Center space at Town Hall for those two months, but no decision has been made. In addition, MCHC proposes to hold the check in and transportation spot for guests of the Winter Shelter at their main facility where all non shelter activities occur. In this way, guests and staff will be able to wait under cover where they are able to control physical distancing. Doing this at the Food Bank as they have in the past would require everyone to wait outdoors in the rain as the indoor space available is too small for safe contact.

Though it has been a time-consuming process to locate space and plan for the special needs during the pandemic, the final and potentially decisive obstacle is the ongoing search for staff, without whom the winter shelter cannot function. MCHC is currently in need of a temporary part-time coast winter shelter administrator and six overnight supervisors to support the Winter Shelter to begin in December. Interested candidates are encouraged to apply. Training is provided. Job descriptions and application information can be found at [www.mendocinochc.org](http://www.mendocinochc.org). Application deadlines are imminent, and a final decision will be made on November 30.

Interim Executive Director, Paul Davis, states, “While we deeply regret the circumstances leading to this result, if we are unable to operate a winter shelter, we will still continue to do our best to accommodate those in need through our ongoing programs, including our year round Hospitality House Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing and other services.”

Please contact [admin@mendocinochc.org](mailto:admin@mendocinochc.org) or call (707) 961-0172 x1100 for more information.