



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.

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.

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 200 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 after 6 p.m. and closing before 9 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.

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.

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 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.

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.

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.

For more information, contact:

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