

Neighborhood Community Meeting
Community Baptist Church, 31 College Avenue, Somerville
July 10, 2024 at 6:30 PM

Hannah O'Halloran, Director of Homeless Services

Shelter Operations Overview

We understand and appreciate that members of the community have questions about our shelter relocation process and we're committed to easing concerns as we move forward with this vital project.

Our shelter has shared the same neighborhood as FCS for nearly four decades. In some cases, neighbors have told me that they had never realized that this has been SHC's home and that they live within blocks of a homeless shelter. Some neighbors have traditionally been extremely supportive of our presence in the neighborhood, even after they realize their proximity to our shelter.

We are committed to the safety and security of all our guests and neighbors and we will maintain that commitment as we relocate our shelter to FCS. We are always staffed any time we have individuals in our shelter. Our policies and procedures are written with a lens of safety for all our guests, neighbors and staff.

Our shelter is low barrier, which means we have minimal restrictions for admission, and we aim to remove as many barriers as possible for individuals experiencing homelessness to access essential services and support that lead to future stability.

Our relocated shelter will accommodate 26 people - 20 males and 6 females. When a bed becomes available SHC will fill the bed with an existing SHC client that is currently sleeping outside. These unhoused clients already have established relationships with SHC through its street outreach and day drop-in center programs.

Our shelter is designed not to be a night-to-night shelter. This means that people do not need to line-up at the door each afternoon to secure a bed. In other words, once a guest has a bed at the shelter they are allowed to arrive at various times in the evening on a daily basis, preventing crowds from having to gather outside the shelter door. This flexibility allows clients to meet their everyday commitments without having to arrive at our door at a specific time each day in hopes of securing a bed.

When guests leave the shelter each morning, they each have a different schedule of activities for the day. Guests typically leave our current shelter and travel down to the Davis Square area. It is our policy that guests are not permitted to loiter/hang-out in the immediate vicinity of the shelter at any time, day or night.

Many arrive at our day drop-in Engagement Center program, which is in Davis Square, and it is open Monday through Friday, 9am-5pm. While at the Engagement Center guests work with a team of housing search workers, licensed clinical social worker, healthcare services, among other services. The goal of the Engagement Center is to provide our guests with the support, advocacy and care needed to help them accomplish their goals.

Ultimately, SHC's shelter program takes a housing focused perspective and is consistently working with our guests to help them find a home of their own.

As with any day-to-day operation, particularly with a vulnerable population, the following overview is not an exact science, but gives a general sense of the day-to-day operations of our Adult Shelter. We make every effort to address community concerns as they arise.

Supervision/Management

The General Hours of Overnight Shelter Operation is from 4pm - 8am. We are open 7 days-a-week. The shelter has staff onsite providing supervision for and support of the operations at all times during operational hours. Shelter staff are available to receive phone calls during the full 4pm-8am shift. Calls regarding the shelter outside of the overnight operational hours can be made to SHC Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm.

Trash

We do not want rodents in or around our shelter facility or around our neighborhood. We are committed to continuing to consistently meet health standards as part of our operation.

We purchase commercial sized barrels from a private sanitation company and utilize those barrels for secure storage of our trash. We also utilize the City of Somerville's recycling program. We currently utilize 4 large barrels and they are emptied once-a-week. With the addition of 10 individuals we will be assessing the need for more barrels and/or increased frequency of barrel pick-up.

Pest Control

We have ongoing pest control on the inside and outside of our facility provided by a private company. We will continue that plan at First Church Somerville and monitor the need for adjustments, as needed, to that scope.

Parking

Over the years, very few guests that have stayed at our shelter have access to cars. Most are on foot, use the MBTA and/or utilize bikes to meet their transportation needs.

Meals

Meals will be prepared by staff to meet the needs of the shelter guests.

Supply Deliveries

We anticipate approximately deliveries at least once-per-week of food and supplies, during daytime hours. These deliveries generally take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

We also receive donations of food and supplies from our local community on an as needed basis.

Smoking

Some of the guests of the shelter do currently smoke cigarettes. We require guests to exit the building and maintain a safe distance from the building and surrounding buildings when they go to smoke. We will provide an outdoor cigarette receptacle to ensure all guests are properly disposing of their cigarettes.

89 College Avenue Door

The primary door that will be used most often by guests to enter the building will be the yellow colored door located on College Avenue on the left side of the church building when looking at it from the outside. The accessible door located on the right side of the building on Francesca Ave. will typically be used by those with ambulatory challenges, and occasionally by a staff member, vendor or volunteer. Church congregation members and staff will continue to use the Francesca entrance.

First Responder Calls

With any vulnerable population, such as assisted living and nursing facilities, there is the need for emergency personnel to be called. On average, over the past two years, there was a 911 call placed once every 11 days (around 3 times per month). The most common calls were for medical related incidents and took place between 5pm-8pm.

Increased Staffing Capacity

We are ADDING 2 Full-Time and 1 Part-Time Shelter Direct Care Staff. Additionally, we are adding 1 Full-Time Housing Search Case Manager. These positions are in addition to our 1 Full-Time Shelter Manager, 3 Full-Time Direct Care Staff and a part of a Director of Homelessness's time for full oversight.

Overall, we will have staff equivalent to 1 Full-Time Manager, 1 Housing Search Case Manager and 5 Full-Time Direct Care Staff members, with a Director overseeing the full operation.

(Note: This is information above regarding operations will be updated (on other documents) throughout the community engagement process to reflect additional information and adjustments**)**

SHC Success Stories

One thing that I have learned in my nearly 7 years at SHC, is that the homeless population in the city of Somerville are people just like us. They are parents, veterans, artists, and community members. I wanted to take a quick minute to share a few stories about people that SHC has supported over these last few years.

I first met Bobby K about 3 years ago when he came down to our main office. Bobby was sleeping outside in the Davis Sq area and mainly just needed help getting to his doctor's appointments. You see, Bobby has a traumatic brain injury so remembering appointments is not his strong suit. He needed our help.

After helping Bobby get to his appointments a few times, Bobby quickly realized that SHC was not just there to help but we were reliable. Shortly after, Bobby started asking for help in applying to housing. SHC wrapped around Bobby and paired him with Leon, a housing search worker. After working with Leon for 2 years, Bobby was housed in Brighton in February.

Many think that Bobby's story stops there but it doesn't. Not only does SHC continue to support Bobby in his transition into housing, but Bobby gives back to SHC. Once a week, Bobby returns

to SHC to provide “community service”. He spends time in Davis square, sweeping, picking up trash and ensuring it is a space everyone can enjoy.

Another client that I have had the opportunity to know and love is Chris. I actually talked with Chris yesterday and asked him “If I was tasked with talking to a group of people about who homeless people are, what would you like me to say?” Chris replied “tell them I am a human just like them. Tell them that I had a bad start in life, but I am working everyday to change it and I think I am doing a pretty good job at it.”

Chris is wrong. He isn’t doing a pretty good job at it. He is doing a GREAT job at it. He came to SHC back in 2021 and has worked tirelessly with SHC not only to get housed but to improve all parts of his life. He meets regularly with his therapist, attends support groups at SHC, volunteers, and has a job. As of November 2023, Chris is housed.