



GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Who is the Somerville Homeless Coalition (SHC)?

- SHC has provided emergency shelter, resources, support, wraparound services, food for the hungry, eviction prevention, and housing solutions to unhoused people in Somerville since 1985. Please visit our website at www.shcinc.org

2. Why is SHC moving its adult shelter?

- SHC's current shelter facility, which is leased and located in part of a basement at 64 College Ave, has been falling into disrepair, with minimal ability to make expansive improvements or updates over nearly 40 years - placing its reliability and sustainability at risk.
- Current shelter is not accessible
- Current shelter cannot accommodate an expansion of beds
- To continue providing a safe and healthy environment for the city's most vulnerable individuals in a reliable facility and to help meet Somerville's growing need for shelter beds, SHC urgently needs a larger, accessible facility.
- Moving to 89 College Avenue - First Church Somerville (FCS) - will help fill an urgent need to support vulnerable members of our population who have struggled to access SHC's current shelter. There is no definitive timeline for the operation of the shelter. SHC does not have plans to expand the scope of this project.
- The new location will also allow SHC to meet the anticipated increase in accessibility needs as elder homelessness rises dramatically in our area.

3. What will be the primary benefits of moving the shelter?

- SHC has not been able to accommodate individuals with disabilities associated with ambulation. Our new shelter will be the first accessible adult shelter in Somerville.
- Community will benefit from the addition of more adult shelter beds to meet emergent needs. Based on Somerville's most recent Annual Point-In-Time Overnight census count, it is estimated that over 40 people are outside in Somerville on any given night
- Community will benefit from a more reliable facility that will be able to operate in a safe and healthy environment.

4. Why was First Church Somerville (FCS) selected as the location of the new shelter?

- Moving to FCS is a natural step, given the longstanding partnership and aligned missions between SHC and FCS.
- FCS facility meets the city's need for more beds for the unhoused.
- FCS and SHC have been partners for over 25 years, particularly in FCS hosting SHC's Monday Night Weekly Community Meal.
- FCS has available space that is accessible.



PROJECT TIMELINE

5. What has been the timeline of the project to date?

- There is an urgent need for relocating the shelter given the state of disrepair of the current shelter facility and the immediate demand for more accessible shelter beds.
- Through a time-dependent grant earmarked for increased shelter capacity, SHC was provided an opportunity to deliver a solution in a shorter timeframe than SHC had previously envisioned.
- A building permit was issued on June 13th enabling SHC to begin renovations while meeting the terms of the grant. The project's permit was issued as a Dover Protected Use.
- SHC began renovations on June 17th and is expected to be completed in the Fall of 2024.

6. What has been the communication process to date?

- On June 14th SHC/FCS notified abutters with a letter with a way for them to ask questions and provide feedback about the project regarding operations of the shelter in advance of the shelter's scheduled relocation on October 1st.
- On July 10th, SHC/FCS hosted a neighborhood meeting with Ward 6 Councilor Lance Davis, in response to neighbor feedback concerning a lack of communication about the shelter relocation.
- In response to concerns raised on July 10th, in an email to neighbors, SHC's Executive Director, Mike Libby, apologized and took full responsibility for not involving neighbors and community members at an earlier stage and recognized the need for a more collaborative process.
- On August 7th, SHC/FCS hosted a second community engagement meeting, which was designed to be more collaborative and provided the opportunity for neighbors' voices to be heard, along with the opportunity for questions to be asked and rich discussion about key elements of the shelter (operations and facilities management among other topics), in smaller focus groups.
- Simultaneously, neighbors were invited to share their thoughts through an anonymous survey and participate in 1:1 meetings with SHC Leadership and Board members.
- Outputs of the survey and the meeting were published on the [website](#) to ensure openness, inclusiveness, and transparency. These documents were shared with the abutters via mail.
- In advance of a third engagement meeting, SHC/FCS reached out to neighbors about the format, time, and date for a meeting.
- In preparation for a September meeting, SHC/FCS has been working on developing more in-depth answers to share about key operations, communications, and facilities management for neighbor input.

7. When will SHC's guests move to the new location at 89 College Avenue?

- Whereas SHC expected that guests would move into the new shelter approximately on October 1st, due to project delays, guests will not be transitioning into the new shelter before November 1st. An update on the anticipated guest move-in date will be shared once the date is determined.



CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS

8. What is a low barrier/low threshold emergency shelter?

- SHC's shelter operates as a low-barrier, low-threshold facility in compliance with our state contract. The purpose of a low-barrier shelter is to eliminate obstacles to entry into the shelter, ensuring that individuals experiencing homelessness can access safe lodging, shower facilities, meals, and essential services, such as housing search, that promote stability and support.
- SHC adopted this model gradually over the past several years (approximately 2020), aligning with national best practices. In 2023, state contracts began requiring all funded shelters to function as low-barrier programs.
- Our state contract prohibits SHC from denying services to individuals based on factors such as sexual orientation and gender expression.
- Additionally, our state contract prohibits SHC from denying entry to shelter to guests due to their past or present substance use or mental health conditions, intoxication (provided the individual is not a medical risk, not a risk to others, and is behaving appropriately), results of drug or alcohol testing, criminal history — unless any associated behaviors are actively and directly affecting the safety of self or others.
- The shelter addresses and holds guests accountable to behaviors that are not safe (up to and including program discharge), regardless of the origins of those behaviors.

NEIGHBOR SAFETY

9. What steps will be taken to ensure the shelter is safe for neighbors and the community?

- For nearly 40 years SHC's shelter program and staff have been and will continue to be committed to the safety of our guests and neighbors. SHC will maintain that commitment as SHC relocates its shelter to FCS.
- SHC has comprehensive guest-related policies and protocols that are already in place and which have been successful for many years. SHC will continuously assess these measures and make necessary adjustments for the new location in order to continue to promote safety for the neighborhood and address reasonable and appropriate concerns related to safety.
- SHC and shelter staff take safety and security seriously. The Shelter has been and will continue to operate in a manner to maintain a safe, healthy and supportive community for everyone that comes into our facility and for those people who live around our location.
- Guests must be respectful of all guests, staff, volunteers, neighbors, church members, etc. Since guests are part of the Shelter and the neighborhood, they are expected to behave appropriately in a manner that is reflective of our long-standing values of being responsible and respectful community members and neighbors. To that end, guests have been and will continue to be reasonably held accountable for behaviors that are not aligned with those values, standards and expectations.



10. How many guests will the new adult shelter be able to support?

- As part of this relocation, SHC will be expanding the number of beds by 10. The shelter will expand the number of beds from 16 to 26 (20 males/6 females) to help safely shelter and support more unhoused individuals.
- SHC will increase staffing capacity to accommodate the guest increase and the shelter is staffed on-site at all times during hours of operation. The shelter will have a staffing model that includes the equivalent of 1 Full-Time Manager, 1 Housing Search Case Manager, and 5+ Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Direct Care Staff members, with a Director overseeing the full operation.
- SHC's shelter program, throughout its history, has consistently received annual funding for its full operation through a combination of the state, city, federal, quasi-governmental and private donations. The shelter's largest funder, the state, has a multi-year funding commitment supporting SHC's shelter operations.



CLIENT CONDUCT

11. What Policies and Procedures are in place to address client conduct?

- We are committed to maintaining a positive relationship with the community and ensuring our guests follow the rules that they have agreed to abide by.
- SHC has comprehensive policies and procedures in place to address client conduct including drug use, loitering, smoking and trespassing.
- We prioritize maintaining a safe and respectful environment for all guests, staff and the surrounding neighborhood.
- Some examples of these policies are the following:

Smoking

- SHC is committed to enforcing our smoking policy on an ongoing basis.
- Smoking is only allowed in designated outdoor areas.
- At our FCS location, the designated smoking area is on and around the steps to the left of the shelter entrance (looking at the building from the street) - 89 College Avenue left-side yellow door.
- Smoking is not allowed on other areas of the property.
- Guests are informed of this policy upon intake and reminded regularly by staff.
- Guests are required to safely dispose of cigarette butts in disposable containers provided by the shelter to ensure cleanliness and safety.

Loitering

- Loitering is not allowed outside the immediate shelter premises or in any areas not designated for shelter use.
- Clients are informed of this policy upon entry and regularly reminded. They are expected to respect shelter boundaries and the surrounding neighborhood.
- Guests that loiter outside designated areas will be approached by staff and informed that this behavior is not allowed. Guests that do not change this behavior may face discharge from the shelter.
- SHC actively monitors this and works to address any incidents swiftly.

Trespassing

- Clients are not allowed to enter unauthorized areas of the shelter property or private property in the neighborhood.
- Trespassing on neighboring properties or in restricted areas will result in guests being held accountable, including warnings or discharge from the shelter, depending upon the severity.



12. What Guidelines are in place to address client conduct?

- The following are guidelines relating to guest conduct:
- Behaviors that may result in restriction from the Shelter and potentially all SHC programs:
 - Threats and threatening behaviors;
 - Aggressive and intimidating behavior;
 - Harassment: verbal, emotional, psychological, physical and sexual;
 - Possession of a weapon or use of an object to do harm;
 - Illegal activity, stealing and damaging property (on or around surrounding area);
 - No smoking in the church building - *smoking only in designated areas*;
 - No heating elements, open flames (incense, candles, etc.) in the building
 - Tampering with smoke/carbon monoxide detectors or other life safety devices;
 - Inappropriate and unwanted physical contact;
 - Not reporting sexual offender status and not registering as sex offender, as required by law;
 - Behaviors creating an unsafe and unhealthy environment (hate speech, inappropriate language, taunting, etc.);
 - Entering restricted areas within the building
 - Possession or use of drugs/alcohol or related paraphernalia in the shelter
 - Trespassing

13. What Warning System is in place to address client conduct?

- The shelter utilizes a warning system as a tool to inform guests that they are not adhering to the rules, policies and general expectations of the shelter program. This is a tool intended to notify guests of unacceptable behavior(s) and to address and change unsafe behaviors.
- SHC's staff are trained to enforce all of these policies with a focus on maintaining a secure, accountable, and safe environment.
- The shelter facilitates regular guest house meetings to address the guest community, collectively, about any safety issues or other concerns.
- SHC consistently enforces policies. Over the course of the decades at our current shelter site, which is located on a very dense residential street, there have been a very limited number of instances of this type of behavior reported to shelter staff. From time to time a new guest may inadvertently sit on the steps of a walkway. But, when it has occurred we have taken any such reports seriously and worked with neighbors to address this behavior promptly. SHC's primary door will be located on College Avenue away from the most dense street, Francesca Ave.
- We encourage neighbors to contact the Somerville Police Department if there is a significant and imminent safety issue in the neighborhood.

14. What is your policy and procedure relating to clients with a sexual crime background?

- SHC is required to operate a low-barrier model for shelter guest entry as mandated by our state contract. SHC is not allowed to automatically deny shelter to an individual based on their past criminal history, including those with a background of sexual crimes.



- SHC recently (August, 2024) had a meeting with the state director requesting flexibility with this contract requirement. The state denied our request for flexibility or exceptions.
- SHC is also not permitted to disseminate information about guests' backgrounds or personal information to the surrounding community or others as it violates the state contract's requirements of privacy and confidentiality.
- SHC takes the **Sexual Offender Registry Board (SORB)** legal requirements very seriously and our policies require anyone who has been convicted of a sexual crime and required to register with SORB to disclose this information to SHC during their intake.
- Any guest that is required to register with the SORB must do so immediately and follow all applicable laws regarding this mandate. If a guest does not follow applicable SORB laws that apply to them, then they will be discharged from the shelter.
- If a safety concern is identified, SHC will work with appropriate authorities to address the situation immediately. If you have imminent safety concerns, please call 911.
- The SORB website allows members of the public to identify sex offenders living or working in their community. The public can also obtain information on Level 2 and 3 offenders at the Somerville Police Department or by contacting the Massachusetts SORB at (978) 740-6400.



SHELTER OPERATIONS

15. Is there a plan to phase in the additional 10 guests into the shelter?

- SHC acknowledges the concerns surrounding the expansion of the shelter. Through the community engagement process, SHC learned that neighbors would appreciate a phased approach to scale client numbers from 16 to 26.
- SHC is actively engaging with its funding sources to determine the parameters of a potential phased-in approach that will be approved by the shelter's contracting authorities.
- Once a relocation move-in date is finalized, SHC will formally submit a proposal to its relevant funding sources requesting permission to phase-in the number of guests, over the existing 16 people, over a defined period of time.
- SHC is obligated by its contracts to receive approval for any guest phase-in proposal.
- If approved, before each incremental increase, the SHC team will carefully assess current operations and address any challenges to ensure that each expansion step is successful and sustainable for the neighborhood and funding sources.

16. How will the clients access the shelter, what are the hours of operation, what does a typical day entail and other related issues?

- The shelter is **open** to guests between the hours of **4:00 PM and 8:00 AM— 7 days a week**.
- The primary access point for clients, staff, and community members to enter the shelter will be the yellow doors located at the front left of the FCS bldg. at 89 College Avenue.
- In general, the door on Francesca Avenue will be used for specific purposes only, such as accommodating individuals with mobility challenges, making certain deliveries that require flat surface entry, or granting access to first responders if necessary. From time to time a person that is not supposed to use this door (guest, volunteer, provider, etc.) may inadvertently use it.
- All church related activities will continue to utilize the Francesca Avenue door as it always has done.
- Our shelter is not designed to be a "night-to-night" shelter. This means there is consistency and lower turn-over of new people and that guests are not lining-up and lingering at the College Ave. door each afternoon to secure a bed. In other words, once a guest has a bed at the shelter they arrive at various times on a daily basis, preventing crowds from having to gather outside the shelter door. This program model allows clients to meet their everyday commitments without having to arrive at our door at a specific time each day and prevented from leaving. Guests need to be inside the shelter by 11pm, unless authorized to come in later due to work schedules, etc. Typically, most guests are inside the shelter well before 11pm.
- When guests leave the shelter each morning (guests leave at various times), they each have a different schedule of activities for the day (e.g. work, vocational training, healthcare appointments, support groups, housing search, case management, etc.). Guests typically leave our current shelter and travel down to the Davis Square area. It is our policy that guests are not allowed to loiter/hang-out in the immediate vicinity of the shelter at any time, day or night.



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- It is an option for all overnight shelter guests to come to 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 workers, 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 have and will continue to make every effort to address community concerns as they arise.
- **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. SHC is communicating with city first responders on procedures for these calls.
- **Parking:** Over the years, very few guests (or staff) that have stayed at our shelter have access to cars. Most are on foot, use the MBTA or utilize bikes to meet their transportation needs.
- **Food:** Meals are prepared by staff to meet the needs of the shelter guests.



COMMUNICATION PLAN - PHONE TREE

17. How will neighbors communicate with SHC if there are issues?

- If neighbors have concerns or questions about shelter operations they can contact both SHC and FCS simultaneously at shelterinfo@shcinc.org

General Comment/Concern/Question

- If a neighbor has a general comment/concern/question, then the neighbor should be directed to email shelterinfo@shcinc.org. An example of a general comment or concern may include topic areas, such as: issues with **deliveries to the shelter; trash/recycling issues**, etc.
- A general comment/concern/question will **receive a follow-up response by the next business day**.

Urgent Situation

- There will be times in which something urgent arises and neighbors may want to contact SHC staff quickly.
- Something urgent is a situation that needs to be addressed as soon as possible, with mild to moderate potential consequences if the situation goes unaddressed quickly.
- Some examples of urgent situations may be: 1) guests **loitering/hanging around outside and causing a problem** in the shelter area; 2) guests **speaking loudly - noise concerns**; 3) guests located in areas that they should not be (e.g. sitting on the front walkway steps of a house); etc.
- During the hours in which the shelter is **OPEN (4pm-8am)**, neighbors can contact the shelter **main telephone number at 617-623-2546** to have any urgent concerns addressed by staff members on-duty.
- As an alternative option, neighbors can also **CALL** or **TEXT** the shelter's **mobile number** (*number TBD*). This mobile phone number will be answered by on-site shelter staff, too.
- During the hours that the shelter is **CLOSED (8am-4pm)**, neighbors can contact the on-call phone at (*number TBD*) to have an urgent concern addressed.
- If a neighbor calls the main shelter line to report an urgent concern, the on-site staff will make all reasonable attempts to address the situation immediately.
- Staff will follow back up with the neighbor within an hour of the initial message to close the loop and report back to the neighbor.

Emergency

- A situation that is defined as an emergency is something that needs to be addressed **immediately** because of the risk of potentially serious consequences.
- Some examples could be: 1) **overdose**; 2) **unresponsive person inside/outside**; 3) **physical altercation or argument**; 4) **Severe medical situation**; 5) **Any other situation that makes a person (e.g. staff, guests, neighbors, volunteers) at imminent risk and unsafe**.



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- If a neighbor believes there is an emergency taking place outside the shelter facility or in the surrounding area, the neighbors are strongly encouraged to **call 911** to contact emergency services.
- After contacting 911, neighbors are also encouraged to call the shelter directly during the hours of 4pm-8am or contact the on-call phone (*number TBD*) during day time (8am-4pm) hours.

18. How will SHC be accountable to neighbors and future concerns that the neighborhood community raises, and how will SHC be able to respond immediately to problems and concerns as they arise?

- SHC is committed to meeting with neighbors to ensure the smooth transition and running of the adult shelter in its new location.
- During the initial stages of the shelter opening, the Shelter will set-up regular Zoom Meetings at a cadence that is necessary to address any issues.
- When frequent meetings are determined not to be necessary, SHC will hold monthly Zoom Meetings with neighbors and the Shelter's Director.
- The remote meeting format will allow for as many neighbors as possible to attend the meeting, given varying schedules, to share their feedback, concerns and ask questions.
- If there are urgent concerns, please utilize our Communication Plan to engage with the shelter outside of those monthly meetings.



BUILDING MAINTENANCE & MANAGEMENT

Somerville Homeless Coalition (SHC) Directly Related Facilities Questions

19. What is SHC doing about trash removal at the new shelter?

- SHC currently contracts with a professional trash removal company, and this service will continue when we transition to the FCS location. Currently trash and recycling pick-up is on Monday.
- To ensure cleanliness and compliance, SHC regularly replaces trash totes to prevent issues such as leaks or holes.
- We recognize that with an increase in clients, there may be an enhanced need for trash management. SHC is committed to continuously evaluating the situation and will adjust by adding additional bins or increasing the frequency of trash collection, as necessary, to maintain a clean and sanitary environment.

20. What is SHC doing about pest control at the new shelter?

- SHC takes pest control seriously to ensure a clean and healthy environment for all guests, staff, church members and the surrounding community.
- SHC currently utilizes a professional pest control company and will continue this practice as the FCS location inside and outside of the building.
- SHC is committed to continuously evaluating pest control issues and makes adjustments to the types of pest control services that are necessary and the frequency of pest control to address any changing issues.

21. What are you doing about the increase in delivery traffic to accommodate the new shelter size?

- SHC is committed to minimizing disruption in the community, particularly with regard to deliveries. We will work closely with all supply and food vendors to ensure that deliveries occur on College Avenue, away from small residential streets.
- Furthermore, we are actively exploring options for delivery services that use smaller vehicles, such as vans, instead of large trucks. This exploration is aimed at reducing noise, traffic, and any inconvenience to our neighbors.
- In addition, SHC will coordinate delivery times to avoid peak traffic hours, occur during the day and will work with vendors to ensure that all deliveries are timely, efficient, and respectful of the surrounding community.
- Certain supply deliveries, depending on the size, may need to be wheeled through the accessible entrance door on Francesca. Other lighter load deliveries will use the College Avenue doors.
- We anticipate deliveries of food and supplies approximately once-per-week. These deliveries generally take approximately 15-20 minutes, or less, to complete. We also receive donations of food and supplies from our local community, on an as needed basis.
- Our goal is to create a seamless process that minimizes impact while supporting the operational needs of the shelter.



22. Who is responsible for cleaning up needles/client trash around the shelter?

- SHC shelter staff are responsible for ensuring that the shelter premises remain clean, including the proper disposal of client trash. This includes regular sweeps of the area surrounding the shelter to pick up any litter or improperly discarded items, such as needles, cigarette butts, or personal belongings.
- In cases where needles or other hazardous materials are found, our staff is trained to safely and promptly remove them, following strict safety protocols and they dispose of them in appropriate disposal containers. If you see a needle on shelter grounds, please contact the shelter staff for its safe removal.
- We work closely with community partners and local authorities to address any concerns about litter or hazards around the shelter.
- If the surrounding neighborhood is impacted, we encourage neighbors to notify us so we can respond promptly and effectively.

23. Why isn't the Somerville Homeless Coalition moving into 95 College Avenue?

- SHC viewed the location/space, but the building needed to be accessible to fit SHC's needs.



First Church Somerville (FCS) Directly Related Facilities Questions

24. How will neighbors communicate with FCS if there are issues?

- If neighbors have church-related questions about church-related events or exterior building concerns they can reach the church at office@firstchurchsomerville.org.

25. What is happening with 95 College Avenue?

- 95 College Avenue is the parsonage of First Church Somerville and is owned by the church. It has been rented out to human service organizations for over a decade and will continue to be used for this purpose in the future.
- The previous tenant stopped renting the parsonage in April of 2024 and the new tenant began renting in June 2024.
- First Church Somerville does not release the specific organization name or specify the work done by that organization to protect the privacy of the residents.
- If there are concerns about 95 College Avenue, now or in the future, please contact bandg@firstchurchsomerville.org.

26. What happens if First Church leadership changes and SHC is still running the Adult Shelter as a tenant?

- First Church Somerville is a Congregational church, which means the congregation (not the lay or pastoral leadership) is the highest authority.
- The church voted unanimously in favor of this partnership and will be faithful to this partnership as we move into the future.

27. Is FCS getting a Facilities Manager for the upkeep and maintenance of the church property?

- Yes, FCS has hired a Facilities Manager.
- Under the direction of the Pastors and the Office Manager, the Facilities Manager will clean and maintain the church building, such as: taking out the trash; cleaning floors; tidying; and, cleaning bathrooms and kitchen.
- In addition the Facilities Manager will attend to the church grounds, such as: keeping grounds clear of debris and clutter; mow lawns, light snow shoveling (main snow removal is done by a contractor); put trash and yard waste receptacles at the curb on designated days for refuse collection; and, other duties as assigned by the Pastors and Office Manager.

28. What questions do I direct to the FCS Facilities Manager?

- If neighbors have church-related questions about church-related events or exterior building concerns they can reach the church at office@firstchurchsomerville.org.
- If neighbors have concerns or questions about shelter operations they can contact both SHC and FCS simultaneously at shelterinfo@shcinc.org