



To: Jenn Gress
From: Eran Pehan
Date: October 23, 2019
Re: Agency Comment on Extreme Winter Shelter Code Changes

In the winter 2018, the Poverello Center served an average of 195 individuals. Rising shelter numbers, and the strain this has placed on both staff and the facility recently led the Poverello Center to cap winter shelter services to 175 individuals.

In prior years, Union Gospel Mission (UGM) operated a winter shelter program at their Toole Avenue location. Per City Ordinance 3519, this use requires a Conditional Use Permit and in early spring of 2018, UGM was notified they would be unable to continue operating a warming center in the Toole Avenue location without proceeding with this process. In addition to obtaining a Conditional Use Permit, their facility would need significant modification to meet the health and safety requirements outlined in code. As a result, UGM has decided to discontinue providing the winter warming center service. These two events, in combination, created an urgent community need.

In response, after months of community planning, the Salvation Army agreed to host a winter shelter program at their facility off Russell Street. If required to comply with the City's Conditional Use Permit process, the Salvation Army would have been unable to provide this service until early spring. Additionally, they would have been held to unnecessary, expensive, and cumbersome requirements, like installing permanent storage or locker systems. Subsequently, City Council held a public hearing and approved an interim ordinance that allowed the Salvation Army to immediately proceed without a Conditional Use Permit to protect the health and safety and homeless individuals in Missoula. This program operated from December 11, 2018 through April 1, 2019 and served on average 50 individuals per night. These are men and women who would have otherwise been sleeping on the streets as temperatures hit sub-zero levels for days at a time throughout January and February.

Planning for the upcoming winter season began in March of 2019. Extensive research was done to analyze the demographic information and service needs of shelter guests and the ideal facility characteristics. Few commercially available spaces provided for these characteristics, which included a kitchen, appropriate egress and fire suppression, and adequate bathrooms.

Additionally, the planning committee researched like-sized communities to determine how they were meeting this urgent seasonal need. We discovered that churches, or Religious Assemblies, are the most frequent host of temporary, weather related shelters across the nation. As written our current code prohibits Religious Assemblies from participating in providing this service. In many of the cities we reached out to, Religious Assemblies were not held to the same regulatory requirements as other entities in opening temporary shelters, recognizing their long standing tradition of meeting the needs of less fortunate individuals in their communities.

The Office of Housing and Community Development strongly recommends the approval of the proposed code changes as they relate to Extreme Winter Shelter. As a community, it is our responsibility to protect the lives of all our community members. The recommended changes remove unnecessary and cumbersome requirements and allow them to do this in a way that is safe and supportive. These changes also support the goals outlined in two of our adopted plans; Reaching Home: Missoula's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness and the Jail Diversion Master Plan.