

Summary Document: Activities of the Emergency Housing and Community Support Commission and Recommendations for Warming Shelter Locations

Prepared for Martinsville City Council Meeting to be held July 25, 2023

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Summary of Activities:

The City of Martinsville Emergency Housing and Community Support Commission was established in February of this year, with a three-fold aim:

1. Engage in discovery of current state of homelessness and community support for such, including housing and behavioral health services;
2. Based on discovery, create and prioritize outputs of the commission; and
3. Draft recommendations for a warming shelter plan.

The Commission has met twice monthly since February and executed the activities outlined above, prioritizing seven (7) initial recommendations using an impact/ effort matrix and bringing three (3) forward as most impactful:

1. Recommendations for warming shelter plan, to be presented no later than July 2023;
2. Recommendations for mental health services oversight in the city no later than March 2024; and
3. Recommendations for ongoing maintenance and oversight of emergency housing and community support no later than July 2024.

The Commission has involved the following community stakeholders in ad hoc and ongoing participation in activities, to include the following:

1. Piedmont Community Services
2. SOVAH Martinsville
3. The Warming Center
4. United Way of Henry County and Martinsville
5. The Salvation Army

Pursuant to our priorities and timeline, and using the information garnered through discovery, the Commission has developed recommendations for a location for a warming shelter plan for the city council's consideration. Please note the following:

1. Six (6) properties were brought forward and evaluated using a feasibility rubric to score properties based on location, accommodations, and transportation, with a possible score range of 0-10
2. Any location within a 2000 feet radius of a school or daycare was immediately excluded from the list (n=3)

Based on this assessment, the following recommendations are being brought forward for consideration of a warming shelter location for Martinsville:

1. The Salvation Army, located at 603 Memorial Boulevard South, Martinsville (feasibility score = 8).

2. The former Harmony Hall, located at 4153 Fairystone Park Highway, Bassett (feasibility score = 8)
3. The former Community Storehouse, located at 4201 Greensboro Road, Ridgeway (feasibility score = 5)

Locations excluded from the list included:

1. Piedmont Community Services, top floor
2. Former Catholic church, located on Church Street
3. The former Virginia Museum of Natural History building

Of note, Ariel Johnson (volunteer director of the MHC Warming Center), Dewitt House (Harvest Foundation) and Craig McClosky (United Way) have spearheaded outreach to the Salvation Army. The Salvation Army is willing to house the Warming Center under the following conditions:

1. Provision of funds to provide facility repairs and upgrades to safely accommodate temporary residents of a warming center;
2. Provision of funds to support full time staff for a warming center; and
3. A plan for independent and ongoing maintenance of a warming center, at a minimum for cold weather months and up to consideration of a full time facility with wrap around services for the homeless population. Informational: The Warming Center has transitioned to West Piedmont Better Housing Coalition as their fiscal agent.

In support of this plan, a grant proposal has been submitted to the Harvest Foundation to offer tapered support over the course of several years to provide funding for these conditions set forth by the Salvation Army. The Harvest Foundation has expressed willingness to grant funds, provided there is also contribution from the city of Martinsville and Henry County.

Understanding the council's current evaluation of city properties for development, we also propose the city consider the following, should our initial recommendations not yield a suitable location:

1. Evaluate properties and runway for development/ yield for revenue
2. Evaluate properties using feasibility rubric to rank properties as above
3. Consider highest ranking properties as alternative locations

The Commission would like to return to city council in the future, at a time based on your recommendation, to share our next body of work related to a warming shelter plan, including but not limited to:

1. Staffing model, including paid staff and volunteers
2. Pursuit of grant monies to support
3. Addition of wrap around services
4. Securing additional resources – food and supplies

On behalf of the members of the Commission, we thank you for allowing us to be a part of improving the lives of our citizens, both housed and homeless, and look forward to your reactions.