Mayor Rhodes-Conway: Madison's temporary homeless shelter for men to relocate to vacated fleet services building

Posted on Tuesday, Nov 10, 2020

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop](#).

Madison Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway announced today that the temporary homeless shelter for men will be leaving the Warner Park Community Recreation Center, where it has operated since March 30, and moving to the recently vacated City Fleet Services Building at 202 S. First Street. The move is expected to occur before the end of the year.

"With no immediate end of the COVID pandemic in sight, the issue of protecting our most
vulnerable remains a priority", Rhodes-Conway said. "I am pleased that the Fleet Services
Building will be able to serve as a temporary shelter while we continue work on a permanent site for a new men's shelter. The Fleet facility will be able to house more men than Warner Park, at appropriate physical distances, as the colder weather sets in."

The Fleet Services Building provides nearly 40,000 square feet of space, about twice the room available at Warner Park. It can accommodate as many as 250 men, while Warner Park had room for fewer than 150. The Fleet property will also offer expanded bathroom and shower facilities, and allow intake and health screening to take place indoors.

The shelter, operated by Porchlight, Inc., was forced to move, in the early weeks of the pandemic, from its previous downtown location in the basement of Grace

Episcopal Church because the church venue lacked sufficient space to meet social distancing needs.

Ald. Syed Abbas, whose aldermanic district includes both the Warner Park and First Street
locations, expressed support for the move.

"The Warner Park Center provided a tremendous service to the community when it was most needed", he said, "but it was nearing its capacity. I look forward to returning Warner Park Center to its prior use and anticipate programming there to resume in January 2021."

The Fleet property is slated to become home to the proposed Madison Public Market and the Mayor emphasized its use for shelter services will not interfere with those plans. "I expect we will have a permanent shelter facility in place by next fall, when work on the Public Market is scheduled to begin," she said.

The City, in partnership with Dane County, is in the midst of a search for a permanent location for a men's shelter and Rhodes-Conway indicated staff are evaluating a number of very promising options. "I hope to be able to announce the site for a permanent shelter yet this year," she said.

The move to expand shelter capacity is part of a broader effort to improve services to the area's homeless population and is hoped to draw those who have previously been reluctant to use shelter. The shelter will continue to take extensive precautions against COVID-19, including daily sanitizing, requiring masks, and symptom screening on entry. Individuals who are high risk for COVID can access hotel rooms, and those with COVID symptoms are placed in a medical respite facility. There is no limit on the number of nights an individual can access this shelter.

Ald. Marsha Rummel, whose district is near the Fleet Building, also applauded the move. "The temporary use of the Fleet Building as a shelter for homeless men is welcome news as we head into the winter months. Many neighbors in my district are concerned about the well-being of individuals camping in McPike Park or living in their vehicles. COVID has devastated so many lives. The City will continue to work on long-term solutions for rehousing displaced people; this is an important part of the solution."

The Mayor expressed her gratitude to north-side residents, Ald. Abbas, and Kemble for their support and patience during the Warner Park Center's conversion to use as temporary shelter. Ald. Abbas is preparing to convene a neighborhood meeting in early December to share information with residents and gather their input.