



COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

149 CHURCH STREET • ROOM 32 • CITY HALL • BURLINGTON, VT 05401
(802) 865-7144 • (802) 865-7024 (FAX)
www.burlingtonvt.gov/cedo

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Burlington Shelter Community and Community Resource Center ELMWOOD AVENUE, BURLINGTON

Updates – new questions from the public or new information: 5/17/22

Concerns and questions have been raised about the impact of the site on the neighborhood and how to mitigate impact. The Elmwood Avenue site proposed is in a residential neighborhood, very close (within one block) to the main downtown area of our city.

‘Being a good neighbor’ – Wanda Williams is the Deputy Dir of Residential Services at the Westlake Village Site in Los Angeles, operated by Urban Alchemy. According to Wanda, the Westlake Village Site is similar to our proposed site at Elmwood Ave. It is in a single family home residential neighborhood, but close to essential services, a hospital, and a school (and urban, in Los Angeles). Wanda told us that a primary drive is to be a good neighbor, not least to try to allay fears and concerns about the Westlake Village and its impact on neighbors. Staff walk the site and connect with guests on a half hourly basis and also walk the neighborhood to check in with any of the guests that may be offsite and to connect with neighbors. Wanda’s agency also uses a neighborhood support group model to mediate and deal with concerns and bring opportunities to the shelter community. CEDO is in ongoing conversation with Urban Alchemy, to help the City to develop a project that is responsive to neighbor concerns and that operates to be a good neighbor.

Elmwood Community Support Group

In addition to close collaboration with service/support providers, and staff having close contact with guests and neighbors too, the Elmwood Emergency Shelter Community will develop partnership with the surrounding neighborhood through the establishment of the Elmwood Community Support Group. Meeting regularly, this recognized best practice brings together stakeholders from public and private sector, neighbors, site operating partner, service provider partners, site guest representatives, faith-based groups, community groups, local business, and government entities. The Elmwood Community Support Group will work to alleviate tensions as they arise, explore problem solving, seek opportunities for community- and relationship-building, and shift biases and stigma associated with operation of emergency shelter. The meetings offer a venue for neighbors to bring concerns and to look for solutions, together. The group will be convened by City staff. The group will be formed once the zoning permit for the Emergency Shelter is approved and the permit appeal period has expired.

Friends of Beacon Apartments was formed in our community (South Burlington) to support the opening of permanent supportive housing complexes that provide housing to folks experiencing homelessness in a housing first model. The community group provides opportunity for neighbor engagement and to respond to initial fears raised about the impact the complex would have on the quiet residential neighborhood.

Updates – new questions from the public or new information:

4/22/22

Will the site have security? The site will be staffed 24 hours per day. CEDO is currently discussing the benefits and balance of security and staffing for the site, while developing the management plan. Whether staff or security staff, there will be regular oversight of the full extent of the premises.

Who will manage the site? CEDO is discussing the site operations with a number of eligible partners. Further information on management will be available when any tender or contract process is complete.

How are guests selected? The site will operate within the State guidelines for emergency shelter. Guest will be referred to the site via a number of partner agencies, 211, or self- referral.

What are the guidelines for guest behavior? While the goal of the Shelter Community is to ensure low barrier access, clear rules around safety will be enforced. *Violence will not be allowed on the site.* The following will be strictly banned within the Shelter Community:

- Projectile firearms of any kind including but not limited to airsoft, pellet, bullet, buckshot, etc.
- Knives, machetes, axes, or other sharp objects
- Explosives of any kind
- Weaponry of any kind not listed above
- Illegal substances, including illegal possession of non-prescribed medication (guests will be asked to show proof of subscription upon request)

Will the police respond to call outs? The City of Burlington is collaborating across departments on this project. The Community Service Liaison Team works closely with the community experiencing homelessness and will continue that work with guests. The police department is aware of the site location and will respond to call outs, as prioritized by the department.

What services will be available at the site? Staff or partner organizations will provide access to supportive counseling and conflict resolution, facilitate connection to necessary services, and coordinate community-building activities. Staff will ensure guests are connected to the Coordinated Entry Lead Agency within 24-48 hours (for assessment, intake, etc.), work with guests to seek permanent housing and develop an Individualized Service Plan. Staff and partner organizations will provide low-barrier access to basic human necessities: food, personal hygiene products and other items, along with the opportunity to connect with housing and health resources, recovery support and mental health services.

Will there be cameras at the site? This is for discussion under the management contract but the intention is to use security cameras to provide security for guests, onsite.

Will there be any additional fencing or privacy installed around the lot? Yes. The site will be fenced and a security gate installed at the Elmwood Avenue entrance. This is for the security of guests at the site. There will be artwork and privacy screening will be added to the existing chain link fence at the site.

When will information on operating partners, or a full timeline for operations be available? Information is being released as it becomes available or as contracts are completed with partners. The planning and public meeting timeline for the site is available on the web page: <https://www.burlingtonvt.gov/CEDO/Ending-Homelessness>

How can I stay informed on the project? CEDO is regularly posting updates to the project website, which can be accessed at this link: <https://www.burlingtonvt.gov/CEDO/Ending-Homelessness>

Have these pods been used in other urban areas?

Westlake Community in Los Angeles California

<https://palletshelter.com/blog/building-community-at-westlake-village/>

North Hollywood Community Los Angeles California

<https://abc7.com/tiny-homes-for-homeless-north-hollywood-village-pallet/10364506/>

Grand Junction Village Colorado

<https://palletshelter.com/case-studies/grandjunction-co/>

FAQ's

- 1. What is happening on Elmwood Avenue?** The City is proposing to use the Elmwood Avenue parking lot for temporary use as an emergency shelter for persons in our community who are experiencing homelessness, particularly those without shelter. The site will also house the Community Resource Center (CRC).
- 2. What specific location are we talking about?** The City-Owned [Parking Lot on Elmwood Avenue](#).
- 3. Who owns the property?** The property is owned by the City of Burlington. It has been operating as a leaseholder parking lot.
- 4. What is the City doing there?** The City plans to improve the site to use as a temporary shelter community for people experiencing homelessness. Its users will stay in climate-controlled shelters with electricity. Learn more about these shelters at: <https://www.palletshelter.com>. Running water, toilets

and showers will also be provided on site, alongside all of the services of the Community Resource Center.

- 5. Why are we doing this?** The number of people experiencing houselessness continues to be almost triple the pre-pandemic levels and access to emergency shelter is restricted from the levels available during the Winter of 2021. On December 16th, 2021, Mayor Weinberger released an action plan to fulfill the promise of housing as a human right. The ten-point plan included a number of initiatives including the creation of a new low-barrier shelter pod community in Burlington.

The shelter module approach has proven effective in acting as a bridge to permanent housing in cities across the United States and is a rapid and cost-effective tool for sheltering the most vulnerable in the near future.

In 2021, the Mayor instructed the Economic Recovery Director and her team to actively engage the public so as to best understand their desires for the investment of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. The Economic Recovery Team conducted an outreach campaign including a city survey on this topic. The Team received an unprecedented 3,877 responses to the ARPA survey with over 3,000 written in responses and suggestions. The overwhelming survey results indicate that the Burlington community strongly desires the expenditure of funds to address chronic homelessness and to implement solutions to find secure, respectful and humane housing solutions for all.

On February 7th, 2022 the City Council unanimously approved the use of \$2.975M of ARPA to address the acute houselessness crisis. The funding allocation included the creation of a Shelter Community and year-round Community Resource Center.

- 6. What kind of improvements will be made?** The City will purchase and assemble 30 small, modular shelter structures that each serve a single community member (five of the shelters will be able to accommodate two people if there are couples who wish to be in the same shelter). The site will also include a mobile prefabricated structure that will house six (6) toilet/sink/shower compartments connected to public water and sanitary sewer services at the site. The site will have appropriate lighting and electricity will be provided to each of the 30 shelters. WIFI will be available throughout the site. There will be space provided for trash receptacles, bike storage and picnic tables. The City will also procure a mobile prefabricated structure to serve as the Community Resource Center (CRC) on this site. The CRC will include additional bathrooms, a kitchen, offices and open community space to serve both the Shelter Community and others that need access to low-barrier daytime shelter, food, coffee, and hygiene products. There will also be an opportunity to connect with housing resources, health resources, including recovery and mental health, and other social services.
- 7. Why was this site selected?** After analyzing ten potential sites, the Elmwood Avenue Parking lot was identified as the City-owned parcel that will best meet the needs of the project because of its proximity to transportation, services and amenities and its ease of connection to municipal power, water and sewer. The City is proposing to use the parking lot for up to 36 months to serve as a location for this emergency shelter.

- 8. What are the benefits of the proposed location?** The CRC and Shelter Village are co-located for efficiency of service delivery and access. Many other services that the community experiencing houselessness need to access are located in our downtown. Our public transit hub is downtown. This is a central site, city owned, accessible, and close to services and infrastructure.
- 9. What type of shelter will be operated?** This is planned to be a low-barrier emergency shelter. The definition of [Low Barrier](#) varies but essentially means that requirements for entry are limited or minimal. Focused on [Harm Reduction](#) a low barrier shelter encourages participants to move closer to services and seek resources by removing obstacles to access. Folks are welcomed and barriers that may exist at other sites are removed. This does not mean that there are no limits on behaviors. There is an expectation that our community members comply with the law and behave in a manner that is non-threatening and respectful. Illegal activity will be prohibited, as will weapons. The site operations will include written standards to meet needs of special populations, expectations of guests will be clearly communicated and easily accessible to guests, and all staff and volunteers should be experienced and receive training in trauma informed care.
- 10. How is the City engaging with people with lived experience of homelessness on these projects?** The projects were each developed including information and feedback from individuals with lived experience, outreach workers, and partner organizations. This outreach and consultation will continue. The CRC was developed into a year-round project on the basis of guest feedback and guest visit numbers that exceeded expectation. Based on feedback via outreach teams working with the community experiencing houselessness, directly from guests at the Community Resource Center, and from people with lived experience that community members, we know that there is a need for alternative types of emergency shelter. Some people find they cannot maintain well in hotels and some need to be able to share as a couple. Other folks have difficulty finding shelter with their pets. These are just some examples of community input. We have received feedback about the set-up of the shelter space and will consult with people with lived experience on the internal layout of the pods and other aspects of site development and management.
- 11. What does a managed site involve?** The site will be managed by an operating partner organization. The site will be operated in accordance with statewide guidelines for Emergency Shelter. The operating partner will be responsible for overall site management and physical services. Other partner organizations will also deliver human and social services for guests.
- 12. How many people will use the Elmwood Ave site?** The property will be limited to use by no more than 35 overnight community members.

13. Who will stay there? The Burlington Shelter Community will be available to persons who are unsheltered. The living structures are small and intended to accommodate single individuals, not families.

14. What are the criteria for living there? Following statewide emergency shelter guidelines, the prioritization might be as follows:

- a. Literally Homeless (Category 1) - Unsheltered
- b. Literally Homeless (Category 1) – Staying in a motel not paid for by self, including those fleeing domestic or sexual violence
- c. Literally Homeless (Category 1) – Staying in a place other than a motel, including those fleeing domestic or sexual violence
- d. Imminently Homeless (Category 2) – Including those fleeing domestic or sexual violence.

Intake will be coordinated with other shelters and service providers, Economic Services and 211 to emphasize ease of access for those seeking emergency shelter.

15. Why can't the City place people in apartments? There are ongoing efforts to connect people with permanent housing and those will continue. However, a chronic shortage of affordable housing in Chittenden County continues to make it difficult for many to find housing. The shelter community, like other emergency shelter facilities, intend to provide safe, short-term places for people to stay until they are able to get housing.

16. Why can't people use the shelters? Burlington's shelter system serves many people in our community experiencing houselessness, but it does not work for everybody. For example, the shelters are not able to accommodate couples without children. They also don't work well for persons who have difficulty being around large groups of people, many of whom have extensive trauma histories and/or may be in crisis. Additionally, our emergency shelter beds are full. Even the expanded Emergency Shelter offered by the State in hotels is stretched to provide accommodation. Chittenden County beds are often full, with clients then referred out of county.

17. There have been many reported problems at the homeless encampment at Sears Lane. Isn't this just moving those problems to a new location? The Elmwood site is being set up to avoid many of the problems experienced at Sears Lane. For example, there will be a limit to the number of people who can use the site. The Elmwood Ave site will provide much safer and more humane conditions than those at Sears Lane, which was not equipped with safe power, water and sewer. The Elmwood Ave site will have bathroom and shower facilities and access to electric power. People will stay in heated structures, not tents, and there will be staff on site to provide property management, case management and other essential social services.

18. What kinds of services will be provided? City staff are working with non-profit partners to develop plans for staffing at the Burlington Shelter Community. The goal is to have staff available who can assist, or connect community members to resources related to housing, health (including mental health and

substance use), as well as meeting daily living needs. Staff will also be responsible for managing and maintaining the property and guest reception for entry and discharge. The property will be staffed 24 hours per day. The Community Resource Center already provides a wide range of services at its current location, downtown, on S Winooski at the VFW building. The CRC offers a safe, warm or cool place, hot food, essential supplies, access to electricity, computers, advice on shelter, housing and much more.

19. Is this arrangement being exempted from zoning or other requirements that other developments must meet? No. The project must meet relevant building and safety codes. It will be required to receive a zoning permit and approval by City building inspectors.**20. How long will people use this site?** The Burlington Shelter Community is not intended to be permanent, nor is it intended for use as permanent housing. Rather, its purpose is to offer a safe and dignified place to stay, where someone who is without housing might get help connecting to housing resources and related services. As people leave the site, it is likely others who need temporary shelter will replace them. We do not yet know how long the shelter community will operate; it could remain for up to three years. Part of that decision will likely hinge on how successful the arrangement is in meeting needs in our community. All participants will be supported and encouraged to engage with our Coordinated Entry system, as part of a pathway to permanent housing.

21. How will people get to the site? The site is accessible by bus.

22. How much will this cost and how is it being paid for? City staff are in the midst of developing plans, both for site improvements and operations. Preliminary estimates suggest it will cost about \$1.5 million for physical improvements, which includes necessary site work, 30 climate-controlled shelters with electricity and two prefabricated modular buildings – one for bathrooms and showers and a second for the Community Resource Center. All of the structures are mobile and will be reusable when the site closes. Site operations will require additional funding for property management, on-site services and 24-hour staffing.

The City Council approved \$1.465 million in ARPA funding to invest in the Burlington Shelter Community infrastructure and operations and an additional \$970,000 for the procurement and operation of the Community Resource Center. The City will be applying for additional funds to operate the site from the State's Office of Economic Opportunity. The CRC was awarded an additional \$365,000 in Congressionally-Directed Spending.

23. When can we expect the Shelter Community to start being used? Preparations for the shelter village are a work in progress. We anticipate site work will begin at the end of May and the Shelter Community and Community Resource Center will be up and running this summer.

24. What can I do to help? We look forward to working with all stakeholders, we all have a part to play in supporting community members back into housing. We hope that we can rely on this generous community to contribute their time and ideas to support this community wide effort. The project will be supported with a community group. Meeting regularly, this group serves to lower barriers, fear

and conflict, and humanize our responses, as a community. This community meeting model operates successfully at a number of other shelter sites around the country. It brings together stakeholders; site guests, staff and volunteers, community members, neighbors, faith groups, activists, non-profits, local businesses, local government etc. By meeting and discussing questions or issues on site and identifying opportunities to collaborate, we may build connections to help to reduce tensions, suspicion and conflict, and work together on opportunities and improvements. As the site's opening approaches, the City and service provider(s) will be able share more about specific needs and asks. Donations of food and other items may be requested but they are generally most helpful, and less wasteful, if handled in a coordinated fashion.