

Washtenaw County  
2014-15 Winter Shelter Response  
Work Group Report

## Executive Summary

Given the limited supply of affordable housing and the increasing pressure on emergency shelter, it is no surprise that we have huge demands on the existing capacity of the emergency shelter system in Washtenaw County during severe weather. A work group was formed to evaluate the issue and come up with recommended improvements. Thanks to willing community partners from multiple sectors rising to the occasion, recommended improvements for the community's response to those experiencing homelessness during severe weather are at hand.

The recommendations include: (1) an expanded overnight warming center to be housed in three churches on a rotating basis from January to March 2015 and staffed by the Shelter Association of Washtenaw County (SAWC); (2) an expanded daytime warming center to be housed in the Delonis Center and staffed by the Shelter Association of Washtenaw County; (3) expanded presence of Washtenaw County Community Support and Treatment Services (CSTS) staff at the downtown branch of the Ann Arbor District Library during cold weather emergencies; and (4) increased availability of emergency hotel/motel funding for CSTS.

It is important to note these recommendations are an intermediary solution to keep people safe in our community while we continue to work on more permanent solutions for those experiencing homelessness.

In addition to significant in-kind contribution from local churches, SAWC and CSTS, recommended improvements will require \$179,000 to operate for this coming winter season, and the work group is requesting that the Ann Arbor City Council and the Washtenaw County Commissioners contribute to this need.

# 2014-15 Winter Shelter Response Work Group Report

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*October 13, 2014*

## **Background**

The 2013-14 winter season was particularly brutal for Washtenaw County residents – and no more so for those most vulnerable residents struggling with homelessness. The local sheltering system was stretched beyond capacity to accommodate the overwhelming demand for safe, warm space during the near-constant emergency weather conditions. Despite best efforts on the part of local elected officials, service providers and community stakeholders, the local response could have been more deliberate and better planned.

To that end, the Office of Community & Economic Development – on behalf of the City of Ann Arbor, Washtenaw County, and the local Continuum of Care Board – and the Washtenaw Housing Alliance convened a Winter Emergency Shelter/Warming Center Response work group. The work group was charged with developing a more coordinated and effective response to the demands on our housing and homelessness system of care for the 2014-15 winter.

The workgroup included members from both City and County governments, mental health and substance abuse agencies, the local shelter, and community leaders:

- Mary Jo Callan, Washtenaw County Office of Community & Economic Development
- Amanda Carlisle, Washtenaw Housing Alliance
- Trish Cortes, Washtenaw County Community Support & Treatment Services
- Brett Lenart, Washtenaw County Office of Community & Economic Development
- John Loring, Washtenaw County Community Support & Treatment Services
- Doug Martelle, Ann Arbor Police Department
- Verna McDaniel, Washtenaw County & the Washtenaw Housing Alliance
- Josie Parker, Ann Arbor District Library
- Andrea Plevak, Washtenaw County Office of Community & Economic Development
- Caleb Poirier, MISSION
- Susan Pollay, Ann Arbor Downtown Development Authority
- Steve Powers, City of Ann Arbor & the Washtenaw Housing Alliance
- Marci Scalera, Washtenaw Community Health Organization
- Ellen Schulmeister, Shelter Association of Washtenaw County (SAWC)
- John Seto, Ann Arbor Police Department

The workgroup met for the first time on August 1, 2014. Over the next several months, the workgroup proceeded to review the scope of the problem, surface and evaluate a set of possible solutions, and explore a variety of community partnerships and funding sources. At this time, the workgroup is

prepared to submit recommendations to the Ann Arbor City Council and the Washtenaw County Commissioners, as well as any other funders or entities which have yet to be identified, for consideration and possible financial support.

This document sets forth those recommendations. The work group wishes to emphasize that the options presented here represent interim improvements, intended only to respond to the immediate needs presented by the winter season of 2014-15. The community’s long-term emergency shelter and warming center needs must be considered as a part of a more comprehensive and systemic process wherein the community’s Blueprint to End Homelessness will be updated. The Blueprint update is underway, and will be concluded in 2015.

## Discussion

The current community resources available to provide emergency shelter or warming center space for persons experiencing homelessness are limited. The following table identifies current resources, their seasonal availability, and the capacity they can reasonably serve.

<i>Current Overnight Shelter/Warming Center Spaces – Individual Adults Only</i>			
<b>Service Provider</b>	<b>Physical Location</b>	<b>Availability</b>	<b># Beds</b>
SAWC <sup>1</sup>	Delonis Center	Year Round	75 <sup>2</sup>
SAWC	Churches (Rotating)	Winter-only	25
SAWC	Delonis Center	Winter-only	50
Salvation Army	Staples Center	Year Round	32 <sup>3</sup>
SafeHouse	SafeHouse	Year Round	46 <sup>4</sup>

During the 2013-14 ‘polar vortex,’ the Delonis Center provided the only emergency-access overnight warming center space in the community. Providing this function, while crucial, significantly exceeded the Center’s physical and staffing capacity. At numerous points during the winter season, the Delonis Center’s nightly capacity soared to nearly double the 50 persons that space can appropriately accommodate. This demand for space during the winter season is consistent with findings from the community’s local homelessness data. During the January 2013 Point in Time (PIT) Count, 166 persons were identified as living on the streets in Washtenaw County – a number that would exceed our existing overnight emergency warming center capacity by nearly 100 people.

In addition to the demand for safe, decent overnight space for residents experiencing homelessness, the temperatures of last winter also made daytime space challenging as well. The Delonis Center historically operated a daytime warming center on its main floor only during ‘weather-amnesty’ (when

<sup>1</sup> Shelter Association of Washtenaw County

<sup>2</sup> Emergency Shelter beds are filled on through the centralized intake process (Housing Access of Washtenaw County) and are almost always full.

<sup>3</sup> Beds are used for both individuals and families; the configuration is dependent on demand at any given time.

<sup>4</sup> Beds are available for survivors of domestic violence only.

temperatures dropped to 10°F or below); last winter’s near-constant frigid weather required the use of daytime warming space much more often than anticipated. The downtown branch of the Ann Arbor District Library also became an ad-hoc warming center for those who could not or would not use the Delonis Center during extremely cold days. In addition to these formal and informal spaces for daytime warming center use, numerous churches and nonprofit entities in the community offered up their spaces for people with nowhere else to go during below-freezing temperature days as well.

Though we may not experience another ‘polar vortex’ winter, the workgroup determined that the ad hoc nature of our emergency overnight and daytime warming center space in the 2013-14 year could be improved with increased coordination and some additional, consistent capacity.

## Warming Center Recommendations

Based upon their review of the previous winter response and capacity, as well as the local data and experiences as shared by both providers and community members, the workgroup concluded that both additional overnight and daytime warming center space would be needed for an improved response to emergency shelter/warming center needs in the 2014-15 winter season.

In order to ensure that there is sufficient capacity during the highest-use months (January, February and March) in which the Delonis Center was pushed beyond capacity in the 2013-14 winter, the workgroup recommends the creation of a rotating overnight (7pm to 7am) warming center to be housed at a series of three churches (with each church providing 7 days/week space for 50 individual adults for one month). This expanded overnight capacity will allow the Delonis Center to maintain safe and appropriate numbers in its facility with the rotating church model in place to provide capacity for overflow. The budget below accounts for 4.5FTE in staffing for three months as well as laundry costs, supplies, and transportation for individuals to get from the Delonis Center to the overnight warming center.

<i>Recommended New Overnight Warming Center Spaces</i>					
<b>Priority</b>	<b>Service Provider</b>	<b>Physical Location</b>	<b>Availability</b>	<b># People</b>	<b>Cost</b>
<b>1</b>	SAWC	Churches* (Rotating)	<i>Nighttime;</i> Jan - March	50	\$71,611
<i>*Work Group members are working closely with SAWC to solidify commitments from three local churches, each of which will provide one month of overnight warming-center space for the period of January 1, 2015 to March 31, 2015. The three churches offering preliminary commitments include: Bethlehem United Church of Christ, Crossroads Community Baptist, and St. Andrew’s Episcopal.</i>					

While the 2013-14 winter season included some weather-dependent daytime warming center response – both at the Delonis Center and at local churches – the work group determined that the community would benefit from a consistent daytime warming center space for the winter months (November to March) so individuals always have a place to go. The work group also agreed that the priority for this warming center space would be the Delonis Center, if sufficient funding were identified to appropriately staff the warming center.

Option #1 below identifies this daytime option for the full 5 month winter season. Should a lesser amount of funding be identified, a truncated version of Option #1 could be considered, with service running only from January through March 2015 (\$56,763). Options #2 and #3 are dependent upon commitments of space and services from community partners. While the workgroup certainly supports leveraging these potential partnerships, commitments for these options were not able to be confirmed prior to the completion of this report. Further, due to a need for SAWC to begin hiring for any option beginning in November 2014, the workgroup agreed the priority should be to fund the Delonis Center to provide this daytime warming center service to ensure they could execute a consistently available daytime option prior to the start of winter 2014-15.

<i>Recommended New Daytime Warming Center Spaces (in order of priority)</i>					
<b>Priority</b>	<b>Service Provider</b>	<b>Physical Location</b>	<b>Availability</b>	<b># People</b>	<b>Cost</b>
<b>1</b>	SAWC	Delonis Center	<i>Daytime;</i> Nov - March	100	\$95,775
<b>2</b>	SAWC & MISSION	Hybrid: M-Th @ Churches* & F-Su @ Delonis	<i>Daytime;</i> Jan-March	50+	\$29,363
<b>3</b>	SAWC & MISSION	Churches* (Rotating)	<i>Daytime;</i> Jan - March	50	\$17,820
<i>*Workgroup members are working closely with SAWC to identify three local churches that will each provide one month of daytime warming-center space for the period of January 1, 2015 to March 31, 2015. To date, no commitments have been made for this option.</i>					

## **Additional Recommendations**

In addition to the recommendations for expanded warming center capacity, the work group identified certain additional priorities for improved emergency response amongst community partners. Given the roll of the public library as a free and open environment for community members, the downtown branch of the Ann Arbor District Library (AADL) experienced a significant increase in use as a warming center on particularly cold days last winter. With this use of the downtown branch in mind, the workgroup recommended that staff from Washtenaw County’s Community Supports & Treatment Services (CSTS) outreach and adult mental illness teams work with AADL staff to identify ways in which the County can better respond patrons experiencing homelessness who seek shelter in the library during cold weather days.

As a result of this effort, CSTS will now deploy staff to the downtown AADL branch on days where local public schools are closed due to extreme cold (when the temperature with wind chill reaches 20 degrees below zero) to offer resources and/or services to interested library patrons. Additionally, CSTS will be working with the library to have an expanded presence year-round to ensure that patrons and AADL staff alike know how to access mental health and substance use resources and services in the community.

Beyond this service coordination recommendation, the work group also recommends consideration for additional funding to support the increased demand for emergency overnight lodging needs in local motels/hotels. CSTS relies on this funding to assist homeless individuals throughout the year while engaging them into necessary treatment and other supports. During the 2013-14 winter season, this funding was exhausted by the second quarter of the fiscal year because of increased demand due to the winter weather. This left CSTS without any funds for emergency housing for the remaining 6 months of the fiscal year. The work group recommends identifying an additional \$11,250, or a 10% increase over FY2013-14, of flexible funding specifically to offset the anticipated overage in emergency hotel/motel costs necessitated by severe weather.

## Next Steps

Based on the warming center expansion and voucher funding recommendations above, the work group recommends the following funding for the 2014-15 winter emergency response:

<b>Total Funding Recommendation: Winter 2014-15 Response</b>	
Expanded Overnight Warming Center	\$71,611
Expanded Daytime Warming Center	\$95,775*
Expanded Service Coordination at AADL	(in-kind)
Expanded Hotel/Motel Voucher Funding	\$11,250
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$178,636</b>
<i>*Maximum amount, depending on faith-based participation</i>	

This report will be shared with the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners, the Ann Arbor City Council and other community partners for consideration and potential funding. Additionally, the Continuum of Care and the Washtenaw Housing Alliance will continue to engage with the community at large and interested stakeholders around the longer-term planning to address emergency shelter and warming center needs in Washtenaw County.