



# Community Questions

Warming Center at Norpoint

Updated 1/15/21

## WARMING CENTER OPERATIONS

### 1. What is a Warming Center?

A Warming Center provides unsheltered individuals temporary refuge from severe winter weather conditions. Warming Centers are being established as a direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated need for additional winter shelter capacity. Warming Centers opened by City of Tacoma operate 24-hours daily and provide basic amenities, such as hot meals, sleeping mats, blankets and showers. Supportive services, such as help gaining temporary employment, housing services and transportation are also available to Warming Center guests.

### 2. Why is the City establishing Warming Centers?

It is a standard practice for permanent shelter operators to temporarily increase the capacity of their shelter locations during inclement weather (cold and freezing conditions, normally during the winter months). The Warming Centers are a direct response to the need for additional shelter capacity during COVID-19, which has limited the ability of operators to utilize their standard approaches to temporarily increase shelter capacity, due to physical distancing guidelines for health and safety from the CDC and local health department.

### 3. Where are Warming Centers located?

In response to evolving community needs brought on by the continuing pandemic, the City of Tacoma and Metro Parks are activating Community Centers to serve as temporary Warming Centers this winter during inclement weather season. In October, Eastside Community Center (1721 E 56<sup>th</sup> St) was opened for up to 55 individuals.

### 4. How will guests access the Warming Center at Norpoint?

Access to Warming Centers is available through reservation only which can be arranged through community service providers, including the Homeless Outreach Team, who make direct referrals to the Center for individuals in encampments. Transportation will be made available to individuals wanting to shelter at Norpoint, and for individuals who want to leave Norpoint.

### 5. What services will be available at the Warming Center at Norpoint?

Warming Center guests are provided three meals daily, sleeping mats and blankets, access to showers and face masks. Guests also have access to supportive employment programming that



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includes temporary employment and referrals to additional services that address barriers to housing, such as mental health and substance use disorder treatment.

At the Eastside Warming Center several guests have been referred to the Tacoma Emergency Micro-Shelters and have been connected with other supportive services. One Eastside guest has been connected to substance use treatment. Valeo, the Eastside Center operator, has also hired eight guests for part-time or full-time employment.

## **6. When will the Warming Center at Norpoint open and when will services end?**

The Warming Center at Norpoint is expected to open within seven to ten days from the community meeting on January 14<sup>th</sup> and will run continuously through February 28, 2021.

## **7. How will the site be managed?**

The City's contracted operator is on site during all operational hours. As part of the operating agreement, the operator monitors the center and properties to ensure proper use of the facilities, so the community can continue to access outdoor areas. Tacoma Police work closely with the operator and community members to proactively address any concerns related to the site. Community members can call 311 to contact their Community Liaison Officer and the non-emergency line at (253) 798-4722 to report criminal activity.

## **8. Who is responsible for dealing with any issues that arise from the site?**

Immediate issues that arise on-site should be referred directly to the operator's on-site staff. The site staff contact information will be posted on the City website once the site is operational.

Other concerns may be directed to the City at [shelters@cityoftacoma.org](mailto:shelters@cityoftacoma.org) or (253) 591-5000.

## **9. How much will the Warming Centers cost?**

Metro Parks has not requested compensation for the use of their space. The City will cover any added expenses including utilities, garbage or incidental expenses related to the operation of the Warming Center.

Eastside Community Center is expected to cost approximately \$170k and Norpoint operational contracts are still under negotiation. Both sites will be paid using Emergency Shelter Grant COVID relief funding.



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## **10. How do I find contact information for the site?**

For contacts or other information, visit [cityoftacoma.org/inclementresources](http://cityoftacoma.org/inclementresources).

## **11. How can people donate or volunteer?**

Please email Valeo at [alanna@valeovocation.org](mailto:alanna@valeovocation.org) to learn about current donation and volunteer needs.

## **12. What is the stand down plan at the end of the season? How will individuals be connected to new services?**

Guests will be made aware of operating dates upon arrival. All shelter guests will be offered connections to services in other locations, and transportation to those services, which include: permanent or temporary housing options, mental health and substance use disorder treatment, referrals to other shelters, employment and benefits such as health insurance and social security.

## **13. What population will be served?**

The site will up to 25 single women and couples, 18 years and older.

## **14. Are pets allowed?**

No, pets are not allowed at the Warming Centers.

## **15. What is the screening process for guests? What are the disqualifiers?**

Prior to arrival, referring service providers discuss the accommodations at the Warming Center so that potential guests know what rules and amenities to expect upon arrival. By phone, the referring provider confirms with the operator that space is available to accommodate the guest. A brief intake process is conducted when guests first arrive to collect basic information about each individual and review behavioral expectations of the site. A COVID screening including temperature check and health questions are asked, as well.

Sex offenders are not allowed and drug use is prohibited. All guests must adhere to Center rules that include not using drugs, being respectful of other guests, staff and the building. Guests must also adhere to all policies to prevent the spread of COVID-19, such as wearing facial coverings and observing physical distance.



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## **16. Are motorhomes or vehicles allowed to be parked in the parking lot?**

If an individual uses their vehicle to drive to the site, they plan to stay inside, their vehicle may be parked in the parking lot; however, they are not able to sleep in their vehicle on-site.

The operator will work with Tacoma Police and Metro Parks Tacoma to ensure proper community use of the parking lot.

## **17. Is there an evening curfew?**

Yes. Doors close for the evening at 7pm and at 9pm quiet hours begin. Late arrivals will be accommodated on a case-by-case basis by the operator and repeated tardiness may result in losing access to the guest's space at the Warming Center.

## **18. How is a COVID-19 outbreak handled?**

The shelter operator has infectious disease protocols such as distributing masks or face shields to guests, conducting health symptoms screening upon entrance to the facility and disinfecting frequently used surfaces every hour.

The shelter operator works directly with the Tacoma Pierce County Health Department to ensure their operations align with CDC guidelines and address any issues with COVID-19. This includes coordination of isolation, referrals to the Hosmer Street Temporary Care Center operated by the Health Department, testing and any temporary program modifications that need to be made.

## **19. How will guests do their grocery shopping?**

All meals are provided to guests by the Warming Center operator and guests will have access to other essential items, such as toiletries that are provided by donation. There should be no need to visit grocery or other stores for food or other essentials.

## **20. What happens if guests are asked to leave for breaking the rules? Will they be provided transportation to another destination?**

When guests are asked to leave they are provided resources to other shelters and provided transportation to their next location.

## **SHELTERING AND COVID RESPONSE**



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## **21. Has the City considered saving money by locating the site on City property, like the Tacoma Dome, or on vacant land in the Port of Tacoma?**

We have conducted site analysis on all City owned available properties and will continue to assess as properties are identified as surplus. The City established the Stability Site at 1421 Puyallup Ave on City property. At this time, we have not identified additional viable City-owned locations.

In addition, the City continues to explore options with public and private property owners throughout the City. Any site that is selected would have to be made available by the property owner and be financially feasible for the City to lease and operate.

## **22. What other strategies are being used to increase winter shelter capacity?**

We are coordinating with The Salvation Army to add 35 beds to their site at 1110 Puget Sound Ave. We are also funding The Rescue Mission's inclement weather expansion of overnight shelter by 35 beds at Holy Rosary Church and 45 beds at Bellarmine High School. These additional shelter beds are expected to be open in January.

## **23. With all the Governor's COVID-19 restrictions on indoor activities how is this going to be in compliance?**

Shelters are essential services that are critical to continue operating in the pandemic by providing refuge to our vulnerable community members. All City of Tacoma shelters follow CDC and local health department recommended COVID-19 safety protocols.

## **24. Has the City identified a location for a permanent solution?**

In 2019, the City contributed \$1.6 million to Tacoma Rescue Mission's shelter expansion project. Due to COVID-19 and new safety protocols, the need for non-congregate sheltering, such as micro-shelters has increased. The City is working to adapt sheltering options to meet the demand for services. At the same time, the City is working to increase access to affordable housing using the [Affordable Housing Action Strategy and is an active partner in the South Sound Housing Affordability Partners \(SSHAP\) which is a regional workgroup with Pierce County Mayors and councilmembers to identify long term housing solutions](#). With increased access to affordable housing, the need for shelters is expected to decrease.

## **25. With so many people experiencing homelessness in our community, why is the City investing so many resources into emergency sheltering instead of permanent solutions?**



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Stand up of temporary and emergency shelters provides immediate relief to our residents living outdoors in unsafe conditions. The City continues to pursue housing strategies, including permanent supportive housing, through the implementation of the [Affordable Housing Action Strategy](#).

## **26. Under what authority is the City able to establish emergency sheltering?**

Warming Centers and other emergency and temporary shelters are established under the City's broad authority to enact programs and regulations related to public health, safety and welfare.

During the City's Declaration of Public Health Emergency on Homelessness and the Declaration of a COVID-19 emergency, the City has the authority to quickly adapt policy and allocate funding to provide shelter and resources to people living in encampments in Tacoma and to mitigate community health and safety risks arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing homelessness emergencies. This means that the City is able to quickly establish a Warming Center or other emergency shelter as needed.

## **27. What is the permitting approval process for emergency sheltering?**

Even though temporary and emergency shelters can be set up as quickly as logistically possible to meet emergent needs, they are still subject to permitting requirements. When such shelters are sited in areas of the City where zoning requires a temporary use permit, a flexible permitting process will follow the establishment of the shelter. After establishment of the shelter, the permitting process is guided by Tacoma's Temporary Shelter Ordinance (Ordinance 29498) with the goal of meeting the intent of that ordinance to mitigate the impacts of the shelter, in balance with meeting the emergent need for shelter.

## **28. Why wasn't the community asked to weigh in on the location or able to vote on the specific location?**

The Declaration of Emergency on Homelessness and the Declaration of Emergency for COVID-19 response provide the City the ability to more rapidly adapt policy and allocate funding to provide shelter and resources to people living in encampments in Tacoma. The declarations also allows flexible administration of Temporary Shelters permitting in order to mitigate critical health and life safety risks for unsheltered individuals. This authority allows staff administrators discretionary authority regarding the approval details of each temporary shelter site.

## **29. What other sites were considered as possible Warming Center locations?**



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We are working with current service providers to assess opportunities for expansion at other sites, in addition to the Center at Norpoint Warming Center in order to meet increased community need for emergency sheltering.

The additional Metro Parks community centers, STAR and People's Centers, are serving unsheltered elementary and middle school children providing educational access to Distance Learning, meals and other services through McKinney Vento Camps.

## **30. How have COVID-19 safety protocols impacted shelter operating budgets?**

The weekly operating cost of a single warming center is approximately \$18k. This accounts for all staff (24/7) and amenities for guests. We have seen an increase in average costs for local shelter providers of approximately 20% since the pandemic because in cases of COVID exposure, individuals need to quarantine and this causes staffing shortages and resulting in remaining staff to work overtime.

## **METRO PARKS FACILITY USE**

## **31. What due diligence did the City conduct to assess impact on the infrastructure prior to materially changing the intended use of the facility, similar to the same process that individuals or people doing business in the city of Tacoma are required to do prior to making change?**

Metro Parks community centers continue to be utilized in their intended capacity as spaces for the community when activated to meet emergent needs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Services that are currently provided or expected to be provided at the community centers during COVID-19 have a lower operating capacity than when activated as regular recreational facilities.

In preparation for use of the site, City staff conduct an onsite assessment with the fire department to ensure safe use, and with the site operator and the Tacoma Pierce County Health Department to provide guidance on how to deploy CDC safety recommendations.

## **32. Do members of the Center at Norpoint need to continue to pay their dues?**

No. Members are not expected to make payments while the Center at Norpoint is closed for regular operations. If a member has questions or concerns about charges to their account are asked to contact Metro Parks. Email [nancyj@tacomaparks.com](mailto:nancyj@tacomaparks.com) using the subject line: "Norpoint Membership Fees."



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## **33. Will Warming Center guests have access to Center recreation facilities, such as fitness equipment?**

The Warming Center will include the gym area for day and overnight use, restrooms, and the large meeting room will be used for meals. All other rooms, including the pool and areas with fitness equipment will be locked and not accessible to Warming Center guests.

## **34. Is it possible that this project would extend beyond March 31? Will the Center be open for regular recreational use on April 1?**

The Warming Center is expected to operate through February 28, 2021 in order to provide Metro Parks time to prepare the facility for re-opening of recreational use under the Health Washington Road to Recovery Phase 2, which is expected on April 1, 2021.

## **35. Does Metro Parks think they will recover after their building gets destroyed? I believe they just had a major remodel.**

The City, and their contractor who is responsible for operating the shelter, are accountable to return the building in the same condition as it is prior to operation as a temporary warming center.

## **36. What will happen to the Center in terms of reopening as our community center for fitness, classes and events?**

Metro Parks is prepared to bring centers back on line for recreation when restrictions are lifted and allow the facility to be used for a diversity of community programs and opportunities necessary to sustain utilities and staffing costs associated with center operations.

Community Centers operate on a different model than fitness facilities, providing a diverse offering of programs and services not only for members, but also serving the community at large. Currently, many activities traditionally provided by the center are prohibited under state health orders. It's possible that even when fitness restrictions are lifted, other uses that help fund the center's operations may not be allowed. Due to the large footprint of a community center, it has not been sustainable to cover operational costs. These not only include utilities, but also heightened sanitization services and the staffing requirements necessary to operate safely in compliance with state and public health directives.





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## **37. Why are Star Center and the People's Center not being used as shelters?**

Both STAR and People's Centers are serving unsheltered elementary and middle school children providing educational access to Distance Learning, meals and other services through McKinney Vento Camps. Distance Learning has created new education challenges for children experiencing homelessness. People's and STAR Centers have provided stability for elementary and middle school children in Tacoma Public Schools' McKinney Vento program. These venues provide the students with access to WIFI, socially distanced space in which to work and support from caring adults.

## **38. What about the pool, isn't that a liability if someone falls in and gets hurt?**

The pool will remain closed and the area locked.

## **39. What is the approval process for Metro Parks to utilize their spaces in this way?**

Our city is in the midst of response to a natural disaster. Unlike the usual acts of nature we are familiar with - that hit swiftly and leave visual wreckage as reminders of their impact - the pandemic entered our community invisibly, but has severely impacted many behind-the-scenes services that provide an infrastructure we rely on.

Public facilities frequently are activated for temporary emergency response uses to help ensure health, safety and well-being of all community members.

Warming Centers and other emergency and temporary shelters are established under the City's broad authority to enact programs and regulations related to public health, safety and welfare.

## **40. With Vaccinations being made available to persons over 70, does this change Metro Parks planned date for reopening the center (since we have a large number of senior members/guests)?**

Metro Parks' plans are currently aligned with initiating some level of operation in conjunction with Healthy Washington Road to Recovery Phase 2.

## **41. And when can the center reopen if it wasn't to be a temporary shelter vs if it is made a temporary shelter?**

Regardless of the operation of Warming Centers, Metro Parks' plans are currently aligned with initiating some level of operation in conjunction with Healthy Washington Road to Recovery



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Phase 2. Should the move to Phase 2 occur prior to the State's current anticipated April timeframe, Metro Parks would provide the City with 2 weeks notice to provide the City an opportunity to logistically relocate the emergency Warming Center services.

**42. With the Star and People's Centers hosting children for remote learning, are there families using the Norpoint center that have children utilizing remote services at other community center locations?**

Students served by the distance learning support program at both STAR Center and People's Center are referred through Tacoma Public Schools McKinney Vento Program (which serves children experiencing housing insecurity) and student transportation is provided by the school district and funded through philanthropy to cover the cost of these operations. We have two locations currently serving this population – People's Center which serves elementary students and STAR Center which serves middle school students.

**43. If kids in the Star Center remote learning program are not in temporary shelters, where are these kids being drawn from? NE Tacoma may have a need as a day remote learning program (for children unable to secure a stable connection at home, since we have three elementary schools that could feed into Norpoint) and that may make more sense than as a temporary shelter.**

There are a number of Distance Learning Camps available for families who are not experiencing homelessness, but would like an opportunity for their children to have access to better wifi and support – a list of those locations can be found on the Metro Parks website:

<https://www.metroparkstacoma.org/distance-learning-camps/>

## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS, HEALTH AND SAFETY

**44. If my property value declines, I plan to seek compensation from the City. How do I begin this process?**

A resident may choose to file a claim for damages within the applicable statute of limitations. More information can be obtained by contacting the City Clerk's Office at (253) 591-5505 or downloading a [Damages Form and Instructions](#).

**45. How do you plan to partner with the community moving forward?**

Neighbors and community stakeholders are encouraged to get involved with the site directly by volunteering or providing donations.



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Neighbors participating in community block watch or other neighborhood groups also have regular contact with City staff in order for us to help with community problem-solving and accessing City resources. To learn more about community groups in your area or to start a new group, contact Erik at [EHasstedt@safest.org](mailto:EHasstedt@safest.org).

For response to an active concern regarding site safety, neighbors will be able to contact Valeo at the 24-hour site phone number which will be posted to our website if the site is activated. To report a crime in progress, neighbors should immediately contact 9-1-1.

## **46. Who do we call to pick up used needles and empty bottles that we find in public spaces or on trails?**

To report needles or illegal dumping in your neighborhood, please contact 3-1-1 or (253) 591-5000 or [submit a request online](#) for City support.

## **47. What are the laws surrounding establishing a shelter so close to a school?**

There is no legal restriction to siting shelter locations within a specific distance from a school or daycare.

## **48. How are you going to protect the vulnerable neighbors in the surrounding area?**

The site is a managed, indoor location with 24/7 on site staff. Tacoma Police work closely with the operator and community members to proactively address any concerns related to the site. Community members can call 311 to contact their Community Liaison Officer and the non-emergency line at (253) 798-4722 to report criminal activity.

Neighbors are encouraged to stay connected about community safety concerns through their neighborhood block watch groups or Neighborhood Council.

## **49. If there are issues with this site and it cannot continue, what is the back-up plan?**

If the City or property owner determine that the site cannot continue, the City will look for an option to shelter individuals at an alternate location in a manner that ensures a safe transition for all guests, and the site will be closed.

## **50. Does the loitering and homeless activity tend to increase around Warming Centers or other shelter sites?**



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At the Eastside Warming Center there has not been a significant increase in criminal activity. There is an increase in reports of unwanted/suspicious people, calls for medical aid, wellness checks and calls for suicide threats.

An increase in medical aid calls and calls related to mental health are reflective of the population being served by Warming Centers who do have increased health risks and may experience mental health issues.

## **51. How will removals be done of unauthorized encampments? What happens if the encampments are on private property compared to on public property?**

The City is currently following guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) about COVID-19 safety and encampment removal on public property. We generally do not perform encampment cleanups on private property. Instead, the City will follow the Tacoma Municipal Code to work with private property owners to ensure encampments are abated. Learn more about our response to encampment removals on [our website](#).

## **52. Will the Warming Center come with additional community policing?**

Tacoma Police will make the Center at Norpoint a patrol priority and Community Liaison Officers will be in regular communication with the operator to address any ongoing concerns.

## **53. How will this site impact my property value and taxes?**

Property valuation and taxes are set by the Pierce County Assessor's office. In other neighborhoods in Tacoma where the City has established shelter sites we have not seen a negative impact on property values, which correlates to property taxes.

## **54. What is the plan for emergency medical services since there is no hospital in NE Tacoma? Has the City of Tacoma partnered with the City of Federal Way regarding emergency services that would be available to residents in the temporary shelter program since those individuals are unlikely to have private insurance?**

Emergency medical response at the Warming Center can be requested by calling 911 as it is for all residents and when individuals are using the sites for recreational purposes.

The transport destination for medical emergencies is generally determined by the severity of the incident. For low acuity emergencies in the Northeast Tacoma area, the patient will likely be transported to St. Francis Hospital in Federal Way. In high acuity incidents, Tacoma General and St. Joseph Medical Center serve as our county trauma centers and would likely be the transport



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destination. It is not anticipated that the emergency pre-hospital or hospital response system will need modification to accommodate potential patients from the Norpoint Warming Center. Tacoma Fire Department has averaged 2.5 dispatches a week to the Warming Center at the Eastside Community Center. We will monitor and adjust emergency resources as needed based on the call volume generated from the Norpoint Warming Center.

Regarding general access to care, all non-profit hospitals, such as the Catholic Health Initiatives/St. Francis in Federal Way, accept patients for emergency services regardless of insurance status. Extremely low-income individuals, such as those experiencing homelessness, also qualify for WA State Apple Health/Medicaid or are insured under Medicare due to age or disability status. Individuals who are not insured or able to pay are offered financial assistance or support retroactively enrolling in Apple Health/Medicaid if they are not enrolled at the time of service.