



City of Cambridge
Department of Human Service Programs
51 Inman Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139, 498-9076

To: Robert W. Healy
From: Jill Herold *JH*
Subject: Prospect St. Shelter

Date: May 9, 1985

Reference:

Attached is information pertaining to plans for the establishment of a new shelter for the homeless in Cambridge.

In the past, the City Council has requested that they be kept fully informed of such initiatives prior to the actual development. The material was developed by David Whittey, Executive Director of Shelter, Inc., and he assures me that he is available to answer any questions which you or the City Council might have.

Community and Youth Services
498-9037/9072
Council on Aging/Elderly Services
498-9039

Recreation
498-9028
Community Learning Center
547-1589

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PROSPECT STREET CHURCH SHELTER PROPOSAL

Shelter, Inc.
P.O. Box 516
Cambridge, MA 02139

Introduction

Shelter, Inc. is an eleven year old non-profit, private organization whose mission is to shelter the homeless. We operate a 20 bed overnight shelter for individuals at 109 School Street in Cambridge founded in 1977, and a 35 bed shelter for homeless families, founded in 1983, at 656 Massachusetts Avenue in Boston. As part of the continuing state and private sector initiative to help homeless persons, Shelter Inc. plans to establish a 20 bed shelter in Cambridge which will provide stable transitional accommodation to homeless men and women who seek a structured program designed to help them find permanent homes.

The Prospect Street Congregational Church has agreed to sell its church property at 90 Prospect Street to Shelter, Inc. for this proposed program.

The Successful School Street Shelter

Shelter, Inc.'s School Street Shelter has been in successful operation since 1977. The facility has 20 beds, 15 of which are for single men and women, and 5 of which are reserved for one or two small families. The School Street Shelter operates as an emergency overnight shelter; guests are not permitted to remain in the building during day hours. Guests arrive at 6:00 P.M. and check out at 8:00 A.M. daily.

As required by City Ordinance, a neighborhood committee -- comprised of residents who live within 500 feet of the facility -- was formed in 1977 and has continued in existence since. In addition (and not required by ordinance), Shelter, Inc. has reserved a seat on its Board of Directors for the chairperson of the neighborhood committee. This ensures that the concerns of the neighborhood as they arise are presented directly by a neighborhood representative to the agency's governing body and that the agency is continually responsive to these concerns.

As a result of quality services in a small home-like environment, competent management, good neighborhood relations, and diversified funding, the School Street Shelter was adopted as the model upon which the state of Massachusetts has developed a system of emergency shelters for individuals and families.

Shelter, Inc. will follow this same basic model including neighborhood representation on the Board of Directors for residents in the area of the proposed shelter at the Prospect Street Congregational Church.

Who the shelter would serve

The target population of the proposed program includes men and women who are living in the emergency overnight shelter circuit as well as individuals who have been recently displaced and have never been in a shelter.

Our experience to date shows that this population includes adult men and women of all ages, from 18 to 85.

People become homeless for a variety of reasons and the route back to stability is not often an easy one. The shortage of housing alternatives for low income people and the inadequacy of incomes for people working at marginal jobs or dependent upon public assistance programs make the task at hand challenging for those of us trying to help homeless men and women. It takes time and perseverance.

The proposed shelter will provide homeless men and women with a temporary residence and the opportunity to seek employment, gain income, and make plans to acquire a permanent place to live. Individuals requiring supported housing will be assisted in acquiring placement in an appropriate residence.

The homeless population of Cambridge has been well studied. The most extensive research is the 1983 UCPC/MAMH report entitled "More than Shelter: A Community Response to Homelessness". Through survey and interview techniques, the report categorizes the various characteristics of the homeless population. These include unemployment or under employment, incomes inadequate to compete in the housing market, lack of medical care, alcoholism addiction, mental illness, and physical handicaps. Perhaps the most outstanding characteristic of the population is the total absence of a support network (relatives, friends, churches, or social agencies) -- a network taken for granted by everyone who has not experienced homelessness. The proposed shelter helps people begin to rebuild that network for themselves.

Staffing

The program will be supervised 24 hours a day by a trained staff of seven full-time and four part-time persons. This staffing is similar to that now in place at the School Street Shelter and the Boston Family Shelter. Our experience has shown that this staffing allows for individual attention and a manageable program. In addition, Shelter, Inc. has an eleven year tradition of involving volunteers in our programs. Working and retired persons, students, religious organizations, and neighbors have found volunteer work in our shelters a rewarding experience. The assistance of volunteers makes possible a greater level of service and individual attention to our guests.

Referrals and intake procedure

Individuals will be accepted to the program only upon referral by a local public or private human services agency. The facility will not operate as a drop-in center and no services will be provided to any person not having such a referral.

Referral agencies will be asked to provide preliminary information such as name, age, cause of homelessness, most recent residence, and other background information. If the individual appears to be an appropriate candidate for the program, an intake interview will be scheduled.

At the intake interview, staff will acquire further information, explain what the facility and program provides, program rules, and responsibilities of guests. If the individual is appropriate and agrees to abide by program rules, he or she will be admitted for a one week trial period.

This referral and intake procedure is similar to that of Shelter, Inc.'s Boston Family Shelter. This procedure provides both the guest and the staff with an opportunity for mutual evaluation to ensure suitability and appropriateness.

Individuals will not be admitted to the program if any of the following apply:

- (1) active alcoholics
- (2) risk of violent behavior
- (3) severe mental illness where restraint, administration of medication, or one-to-one supervision is indicated
- (4) nursing care is required, e.g. individuals not capable of eating, dressing, etc.
- (5) special needs requiring a level of support beyond the capacity or competence of the program staff
- (6) indications the individual will not accept or comply with program rules

Because of these rules, and their continual enforcement by staff, Shelter Inc.'s neighborhood relations in both Cambridge and Boston are excellent. We recognize that there are individuals who are not suitable for the community based facilities we operate. Such individuals must be cared for elsewhere.

General program policies

A key feature of the proposed program, distinguishing it from all other shelter programs in the Cambridge area, is that guests will be provided with more than just overnight shelter. Although the program will provide a temporary residence, this does not mean guests will be allowed to leave or enter the facility at any time of the day or night, nor does it mean guests will be encouraged to remain in the facility 24 hours a day.

On the contrary, the program will be highly structured and closely supervised. Guests will be required to arise at a certain hour, meals will be served only at scheduled times, and guests will be required to account for how they spend their time. Guests who are capable of working must do so. Those who cannot work will be required to participate in other activities.

Some guests will have day time jobs and will leave the facility in the morning to go to work. Others will have appointments to keep or activities to attend at other locations and will leave the facility for those purposes.

A few guests will work at evening or overnight jobs, for example at local fast food chains, security companies, or factories. They will be allowed to leave the facility to go to work and to return after work. Thus an individual working an evening or overnight job will have a place to stay after work -- something which the overnight emergency shelters are unable to provide. This is one of the advantages to homeless people of a transitional shelter program.

Individual schedules will be carefully built and maintained. In this way, guest arrival and departure at the facility will be monitored by the staff. These policies will ensure that the comings and goings of the 20 individuals housed in the facility will not be noticeably greater than present activities in the building.

Guests will be required to participate regularly in house meetings. The purpose of these meetings is to provide peer and professional support to each individual as well as an opportunity for formal interaction among and between staff and guests.

Guests will also be required to keep periodic meetings with the Program Director, Social Worker, and/or House Manager. At these meetings the progress of the individual towards attaining their housing goal will be reviewed as well as their compliance with the specific terms of their Mutual Service Agreement.

The staff of the shelter program will hold weekly meetings to review individual cases and take appropriate actions. Staff actions will range from revision of Mutual Service Agreements to discharge of an individual from the program should that be necessary either for rules infraction or for failure to take responsibility in solving one's own problems.

In addition, the staff will organize and supervise both required and voluntary in-house group activities of educational, personal development, social, or recreational nature.

Thus the program will be carefully structured, controlled and monitored. This is not a program for individuals who are not serious about helping themselves or who have no desire to overcome homelessness. Such individuals will not be admitted to the program or will be discharged if found to have no motivation and no desire to take responsibility for their lives. Shelter, Inc. was founded for the purpose of helping homeless people but in our programs we insist that individuals help themselves to the full extent of their capabilities. The program

will not offer a "free ride" to lazy or irresponsible individuals, but it will -- as our record proves -- provide stability and security to men and women whose needs are great and resources are few.

Length of stay

Length of stay will be determined on a case basis in relation to an individual's needs and plan for obtaining permanent housing. It is estimated that the average length of stay will be three months. The total annual number of guests served would be approximately 80 individuals at three months average length of stay.

Length of stay is contingent upon the cooperation of the guest with the staff and program rules. A further contingency is that the guest must meet responsibilities which will be specified in a Mutual Service Agreement. Such responsibilities will include gaining or maintaining employment, budgeting and saving a portion of income for obtaining housing, keeping appointments with the staff social worker and/or other service providers, conducting a housing search, maintaining a clean and neat living area, and participating in an in-house work schedule.

Linkage with other service agencies

The program will be integrated with existing service agencies in the community. To be successful in its goal of helping individuals to overcome homelessness the program must support and be supported by other agencies.

The program will be most appropriately used if it provides a temporary residence for eligible individuals who are or will become linked to an agency which is participating in obtaining housing for the individual and/or providing special services the individual may need.

Shelter, Inc. will seek reciprocal service agreements with the following agencies:

- Cambridge/Somerville Elder Services Corporation (SCES)
- Cambridge Committee of Elders
- Cambridge/Somerville Program of Alcohol Rehabilitation (CASPAR)
- Cambridge/Somerville Mental Health and Retardation
- Cambridge Department of Public Welfare
- Cambridge Department of Human Services

Specifically, Shelter, Inc. will seek service agreements for making appropriate referrals to the program, giving priority to admitted individuals for openings in appropriate community residences operated by the agency, providing on-going counseling and other supportive services while individuals are in the program, providing support to the shelter program staff, and cooperating in casework and advocacy.

In addition, Shelter, Inc. has developed and maintained excellent working relations with city agencies such as Cambridge Hospital, Cambridge Police and Fire Departments. These relations, developed over an eleven year period, provide ready linkage to emergency services for the new program.

The proposed site

Prospect Street Congregational Church is a brick structure of approximately 5300 square feet containing a first floor main level, a second floor balcony level, and a basement containing finished and unfinished spaces.

The main level consists of a sanctuary and open space presently used for day care, education classes, meetings, and social activities. The main level also contains office space, a full kitchen, and a bathroom.

The second floor balcony is located in the sanctuary and consists of seating and a small office area.

The basement level contains three finished rooms used for day care, two bathrooms designated for men or women, and two unfinished storage rooms.

The facility is equipped with a modern smoke detection and internal alarm system, fire alarm pull boxes, fire extinguishers, and emergency lighting.

Use of the facility will proceed in two phases. In Phase One, the program will begin operating using space in the rear of the sanctuary and finished basement space. The sanctuary will not be used during Phase One. Temporary partitions will provide individual living quarters for 20 persons. The existing kitchen will be used. Common space for dining, recreation, reading and quiet space will be provided in the finished basement rooms and on the first floor level. Office space will be provided for the Program Director, Social Worker, and House Managers on the first floor level.

Prior to beginning the program, showers will be installed in the two basement bathrooms. Installation of showers and erecting of temporary space dividers are the extent of renovations planned in Phase One.

During Phase Two the sanctuary will be converted into a model 20 bed facility featuring individual rooms and a variety of common spaces for men and/or women. Accommodations provided at a modern YMCA or YWCA give a sense of the facility envisioned. It is estimated Phase Two will take one to two years to complete. During this period the program will continue to operate. When completed, the program will be moved to what is now the sanctuary space and the space used for the program in Phase One will be converted to offices for use by Shelter, Inc. administrative staff.

Administrative staff will consist of five full time persons plus one or two student interns. When Phase Two is fully completed the existing structure will contain a model 20 person facility plus office space. The entire structure will be occupied by Shelter, Inc.

Shelter, Inc. intends to preserve the exterior of the church building. No modifications to the exterior will be made unless required by city government. However, improvements and renovations contemplated include reroofing of the bell tower, replacing missing shingles on the main roof, and rejointing of loose brick.

Exits and Entrances

The existing structure contains seven means of egress. Three of these are located at the main church entrance. These would not be used for program purposes during Phase One, but will be used upon completion of Phase Two. The other four egresses are located on the southeasterly side of the building consisting of two doors leading to the first floor level and two bulkheads leading to the basement. The latter will be designated as emergency exits. The two doors will be the main entrance to the building during Phase One.

Front grounds

The front grounds of the church will be preserved except that landscaping for purpose of beautification is envisioned. As previously stated, guests will not be allowed to use the grounds of the building and any landscaping will be designed to enhance the appearance and improve the privacy of the structure and the neighborhood -- not to encourage use by guests. Shelter, Inc. welcomes the participation of the neighborhood in redesigning the grounds.

Deliveries

The shelter program will occasionally require the delivery of food and other supplies. To permit such occasional delivery without blocking traffic on Prospect Street, the City will be petitioned to install a vehicle access ramp in front of the main gate. The main gate and main brick walk will be preserved if possible or modified if necessary to permit a van or six wheel truck to occasionally back onto the property. Delivery of food and other supplies will then be made by a hand truck to the northeasterly entrances.

Parking

Shelter, Inc. will make no parking spaces in the front of the church unless required to do so by city government. The agency has one vehicle, a van, which is permitted to park on School Street by virtue of building ownership. No change in that arrangement will take place as a result of acquiring the Prospect Street Church.

Staff will not be provided with parking and as a consequence will be expected to use public transportation easily accessible in Central Square or to purchase private parking from the Green Street parking facility or from two privately owned parking lots on Bishop Allen Drive or from other private lots in the area. The existing School Street Shelter has a staffing pattern similar to that proposed for the Prospect Street Church program and no staff come to work using private vehicles.

As for guests, homeless individuals do not own automobiles nor would be admitted to the program if they do.

All staff and visitors to the program will be informed that parking on St. Paul Street and in the Bread and Circus parking lot is prohibited. Visitors will be advised to park at metered spaces or public and private parking facilities. Shelter, Inc. will cooperate in the towing of any

vehicles connected with the agency. Staff who violate the prohibition on parking on St. Paul Street or Bread and Circus property will be terminated.

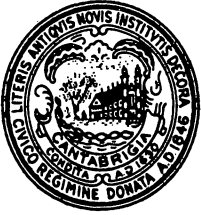
Trash Removal

A modest quantity of trash, not more than is typical for an apartment building containing four or five families, will be generated by the program. This is generally not more than 10 30-gallon trash barrels or 20 plastic bags weekly. Trash will be placed for pick-up on the sidewalk on appropriate days. An inconspicuous trash barrel storage shed containing approximately ten covered 30-gallon plastic barrels will be constructed on the northwesterly side of the building.

Conclusion

We seek to establish a unique facility and program serving a modest number of some of the neediest people in our community. The need for the program and the entitlement of homeless persons to assistance is unquestioned. After two years of searching for a suitable facility, the Prospect Street Church may well represent the last chance for the people of Cambridge to help their homeless neighbors.

The Prospect Street Church Congregation has decided to give Shelter, Inc. a chance to acquire the property, despite the fact that our offer was \$125,000 less than the highest bidder, because of their conviction that this place of worship, constructed in 1872, should continue to be used for God's work. We appreciate their confidence in us and ask for the support and assistance of the entire community in making that worthy goal a reality.



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139
Tel. 498-9011

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
ROBERT W. HEALY
City Manager

May 13, 1985

To the Honorable, the City Council:

Enclosed for your information is a communication from Jill Herold, Assistant City Manager for Human Service Programs, pertaining to plans for the establishment of a new shelter for the homeless in Cambridge.

Very truly yours,

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH/b

S-392

Re: enclosing information pertaining to plans
for the establishment of a new shelter for the
homeless in Cambridge.

In City Council,

May 13, 1985

5/13/85

Placed

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File