



Corrections to the “Homeless Services Center Canvasser Script”

The City of Portland values public dialogue and in this spirit we open the Barron Center to the community and the Nason’s Corner Neighborhood Association for their meetings regarding the City’s recommendation to locate the Homeless Services Center on the Barron Center Campus.

With that said, it is critical that members of the public have access to accurate information. The information included in the “Canvasser Script” contains several inaccuracies to which we have responded below:

- The Oxford Street Shelter has a total bed capacity of 229. There are 154 beds at Oxford St. and an additional 75 beds located in the Preble Street Resource Center that we staff each night when there are more than 154 individuals who need shelter.
- “A.” The Homeless Service Center proposal does indeed follow best practices for ending homelessness, including operating 24 hours, 7 days per week with all meals and individual services on site. We have on-site housing counselors who develop a housing plan with each guest and meet with them regularly to assist them in finding long-term housing. We follow-up, in person, with every individual on a monthly basis to assure they are stable and their housing is not at risk. We also provide the landlords with contact information to contact us before an individual gets to the point of losing housing. We work closely with all Housing First developments, sitting on the screening committees to assure that our neediest guests get housed. The new building will be designed to provide a floor plan for the maximum safety of guests. Transportation will be easily accessible, and the atmosphere will be respectful and the grounds and facility safe. We will develop plans with the neighborhood and provide 24-hour phone response to the neighborhood.

The shelter model proposed should not be characterized as “warehousing” individuals as this is an emergency shelter and the focus is on making sure stays are transitional. To the contrary, guests will receive more individual services

because the providers will be on-site so appointments won't be missed. Substance use, mental illness and physical illnesses will all be treated on-site through a health clinic operated by Greater Portland Health which will also offer dental care.

- “B.” The statement that “heavily wooded areas invite increased drug activity and other violent crimes” is a concern rather than a fact. It is not substantiated by any data.
- “C.” A scattered shelter model would be more expensive and increase property owners’ taxes. Additionally, it will be more logistically challenging for shelter staff and guests, and it would decrease the number of services the shelter guests could receive on-site because our local service provider partners do not have the resources to staff 5 or 6 different locations.
- “E.” “Crime and other incidents.” It’s important to note that shelter guests are often the victims rather than the perpetrators. In the current shelter model, guests are forced to leave the facility many times throughout the day to seek services and meals. The new shelter model will allow them to access a variety of services, meals, and outdoor space on-site rather than exposing them to predators.
- The safety plan developed in partnership with the Portland Police Department is sound and brings more public safety staff into the area than has been in the past, thus providing a faster response time and more proactive interventions.

We appreciate the fears and concerns, and are committed to working together to address the need for information and on-going communication. City staff will be rolling out additional information at an upcoming community forum on September 8 from 11 AM - 1PM at Hannaford Hall at the University of Southern Maine.

Sincerely,

Dawn Stiles, Director
Health & Human Services Department
City of Portland

dcs@portlandmaine.gov
207-874-8775