

## ***City set to open Emergency Homeless Shelter in early November under a State of Oregon Grant***

The City of Ashland is experiencing the impacts of homelessness just like the rest of the nation. The State of Oregon and other states including California, Hawaii, Montana and Washington, have all declared a state of emergency on homelessness. Cities across the country are learning how to adapt and balance services to the homeless while also supporting the broader needs of their community at large.

As a response to the homelessness crisis, Governor Kotek's issued state of emergency declaration (EO-23-02) provides grant funding to cities and counties in Oregon. Over the past six years, The state of Oregon has seen a 63% increase in homelessness, while Jackson County has seen a 132% increase. The number of unsheltered homeless individuals in Oregon were estimated to be 18,000 in 2022.

Homelessness in Ashland is estimated at 80 to 125 individuals, which is approximately 10% of the Jackson County overall estimate.

The City of Ashland has received grant funding to help purchase the property at 2200 Ashland St, which will provide emergency shelter to at least 30 individuals. The state funding requires that the Emergency Homeless Shelter operate until January 10, 2024. The acquired shelter property will also function as the City's Severe Weather Shelter when open until approximately March 30, 2024.

Staff began searching for a suitable homeless shelter property before February 2023, and held four Executive Sessions between February and August 2023, to discuss sites. Ashland is a small community with limited commercial properties with an existing building that can accommodate an emergency shelter and meet important selection criteria such as access to transit and proximity to supportive retail businesses.

Council's intent was to reach out to the public before formally approving the purchase of 2200 Ashland St; however, the final agreement with the seller of the property was not reached until Friday, August 11, 2023. This meant that for the City to meet the operational timing requirements of the state grant, the purchase approval had to be made at next City Council meeting on August 15, 2023 (*The Council did not meet again until September 19, 2023, due to Labor Day*). If the City had delayed the purchase approval it would have missed the property's purchase deadline necessary to make building and site improvements and to opening the emergency shelter under the state grant obligation.

Since the August 15, City Council meeting, the City has done the following to engage with the community:

- August 23 – City staff met with Siskiyou School officials to discuss campus security questions related to its public access easement to Clay St Park and the shelter location.
- August 28 – City website created for Emergency Homeless Shelter information with the opportunity for the community to submit comments/questions and view responses.
- September 6-7 – An informational letter from Mayor Graham was sent to the residential neighborhood areas near the Emergency Homeless Shelter property.

- September 11 – City Council members walked the residential neighborhoods near the shelter property to inform them about the shelter and hear concerns.
- September 14 – A Neighborhood meeting with the Mayor, Councilors and City staff was held at Stevenson Union on the SOU campus to discuss the shelter’s acquisition and operation.

Next steps to continue community involvement include:

- October 2 – An update presentation on the Emergency Homeless Shelter’s operation plans and an opportunity for public input will be held at the City Council Study Session. The Council will also have the opportunity to discuss and provide guidance to City staff on future use of the emergency shelter property.
- October 3 – The Council’s Regular Business meeting agenda is expected to include a non-profit contract for operation services at the Emergency Homeless Shelter.
- Mid-October – A neighborhood Open House of the shelter will be held to provide an opportunity for the community to see the shelter and ask questions.

In recent months, the City has fielded concerns regarding private property intrusions and the use of public spaces, including City parks, by those who are unhoused. As a response, the City has done the following:

- *Dusk to Dawn* sleeping lawn behind the Ashland police station on East Main St was established in May 2023, and will continue to operate.
- The City’s Inclement Weather Policy was updated in 2023, and as a result more Severe Weather Shelters are operating year-round to help prevent health risk or loss of life due to extreme temperatures or smokey days.
- With state grant funding in place, the City will open the Emergency Homeless Shelter in early November through January 10, 2024. The City will partner with a local non-profit service provider who will oversee operations at the shelter and assist by offering navigation services to help transition people to permanent housing.
- The Ashland Police Department is working to enforce behavioral expectations and increase patrol presence in the Ashland St, Clay St, and the Bear Creek Greenway areas. The department will expand its Cadet Program to assist in patrol of City parks and other properties and is exploring the possibility of opening a police storefront office near I-5’s Exit 14 .

“The police department is developing strategies to increase uniform presence near the Ashland Street Business corridor as staffing allows, to include a possible office presence in the area,” stated Police Chief, Tighe O’Meara.

The Emergency Homeless Shelter will be a 24-hour operation and occupants will have access to navigation services. The goal is to stabilize the people who are experiencing homelessness and help them transition to permanent housing.

An application process will be in place for acceptance into the Emergency Homeless Shelter that will include a background check. Known sex offenders will not be permitted to stay in the shelter. The property will not be a campground or function as a nightly *Dusk to Dawn* sleeping lawn. The City is working to collect and organize information for a report to residents and businesses near the Emergency Shelter on issues that may arise during the operation of the Emergency Homeless Shelter.

After January 10, 2024, the current state grant's obligation for the City to provide an Emergency Homeless Shelter will expire and the shelter property will begin transitioning to operate as a Severe Weather Shelter. The City's Severe Weather Shelter has historically only operated intermittently for nights during winter months as weather circumstances dictate. It is expected to serve in this capacity until approximately March 30, 2024, depending on the availability of funding, a non-profit operator and volunteer resources.

The City's Inclement Weather Policy dictates that a Severe Weather Shelter can be activated when the temperature is at 32 degrees Fahrenheit or below and consider such factors as wind chill, precipitation, duration or in instances where the National Weather Service issues a Weather Warning. Considerations for a shelter for extreme heat or smoke will be explored at a later time.

To date, the City Council has made no other policy decisions on the use of the newly acquired shelter property other than to operate it as an Emergency Homeless Shelter until January 10, 2024, per the state grant and then operate it as the annual Severe Weather Shelter within existing City policies and available funding. The October 2, 2023, Study Session will provide an opportunity for Council to discuss the property's use and provide additional policy guidance to staff.

Stay abreast of the Emergency Homeless Shelter on the City website at [ashland.or.us/EmergencyShelter](https://ashland.or.us/EmergencyShelter).