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Outdoor Emergency Shelters add to urgent work protecting people experiencing homelessness from COVID-19

PORTLAND (April 10, 2020) — Adding to the community’s urgent work to protect neighbors experiencing homelessness from COVID-19, the City of Portland, JOIN and a team of providers and advocates next week will open three temporary Outdoor Emergency Shelters that will offer safer and healthier places to sleep for vulnerable adults without shelter.

The three city-owned sites — two in the Central Eastside and one in Old Town/Chinatown — will each host 45 tents for the duration of the city’s COVID-19 emergency declaration.

“We’ve heard over and over that social distancing is critically important to help slow the spread of the virus. For our neighbors that haven’t been able to get into housing or shelter right now, we can’t just leave them without any options,” said **Katrina Holland**, **JOIN**’s executive director. “JOIN is grateful to be partnering with so many incredible leaders to help make some of those options possible.”

“We fully support this initiative and look forward to seeing how the district’s safety and cleaning teams and businesses can work with the camps,” said **Kate Merrill**, executive director of the **Central Eastside Industrial Council** business district. “Safety for our most vulnerable is Safety for All.”

Each site will serve single adults, or adults with partners, who are currently experiencing homelessness without shelter in Multnomah County. One site will prioritize people who identify as LGBTQ+, while a second site will prioritize people from communities of color.

The Outdoor Emergency Shelters will operate like temporary tent villages — offering not just a supportive community environment, but also providing access to regular meals, drinking water, shower and handwashing amenities, and restrooms.

They will help fill a gap in services at a time when life-saving physical-distancing measures have forced places like libraries and cafes, and many day centers, to close, modify services or shorten their hours.

“The reality is that a stay-at-home order leaves those without homes to return to behind, and we can’t let that happen,” **Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty** said. “While the housed community can take refuge in their homes and have the bulk of their needs met during this time, our houseless neighbors have lost the many resources and support networks they depended on.

“These sites are critical for the public health, safety, and dignity of our houseless community, and I appreciate the collaboration and effort it took to turn these into a reality.”

“These supported campsites are an important next step for unhoused people to shelter in place while meeting hygiene needs,” said **Kaia Sand**, executive director of **Street Roots**. “An extraordinary collaboration between community organizers and the city of Portland and Multnomah County, these three temporary campsite villages demonstrate that we can be creative and constructive in pursuit of public health. It makes me hopeful for what more we can do.”

While many people with COVID-19 will have only mild to moderate symptoms and recover without medical intervention, that may be less true for our neighbors experiencing homelessness. They tend to be older or have more underlying health conditions, both of which put them at higher risk of serious symptoms and potentially fatal infections.

That’s why local governments and nonprofits have taken a series of steps over the past five weeks to protect this vulnerable population. Those steps include:

- Spreading more than 400 shelter beds into extension sites or extended winter shelters, all at public buildings: the Mead Building, the Oregon Convention Center, the Charles Jordan Community Center, the East Portland Community Center and the Mt. Scott Community Center.
- Creating special motel-based facilities where people in shelters who develop respiratory symptoms, including people at these new outdoor sites, can self-isolate and receive respite care.
- Increasing hygiene options by placing dozens of portable toilets and handwashing stations in strategic spots across the city, and opening dozens of park bathrooms 24 hours a day. (Seen an interactive map of locations [here](#).)

- Restricting most camp cleanups that require people to move, while also increasing trash pickup service for camps.
- Ongoing distribution of supplies for outreach workers to share, including face coverings, blankets, tarps and sanitizer. An outreach mission in March, across the entire County, brought supplies and information to more than 2,500 people.

“People experiencing unsheltered homelessness are among the most vulnerable in our community during this COVID-19 crisis,” **Mayor Ted Wheeler** said. “We’re all in this together so we must do everything in our power to ensure everyone can practice safe physical distancing and take proper hygiene measures.”

JOIN, which provides outreach and other services through a contract with the Joint Office of Homeless Services, is leading an intake and reservation process for the three sites. Prior to arriving, guests will be required to make a reservation ahead of time, through JOIN’s intake process. Due to limited capacity, none of the sites will be able to accommodate those who are dropped off or who walk up to the site.

Each Outdoor Emergency Shelter will adhere to physical distancing and sanitization guidance issued by Multnomah County Public Health and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Businesses also continue to support the community’s ongoing work to protect people experiencing homelessness.

“Businesses, like our own member the Jupiter Hotel, have come together in a powerful way to help our most vulnerable,” Merrill said.

“The number one priority for the business community is an effective public health response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Once again, Portland is ahead of the curve. Prioritizing the unsheltered among us by creating emergency temporary sheltering sites where needed medical services can be accessed, and physical distancing measures are applied, is absolutely necessary at this time for our most vulnerable neighbors,” said **Andrew Hoan**, president and CEO of the **Portland Business Alliance**.

“On behalf of our members and partners at Downtown Portland Clean & Safe, we commend Commissioner Hardesty and Mayor Wheeler for their rapid and innovative approach to caring for those who need it most in these challenging times.”

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