

Civic Field Winter Shelter FAQs

Why do we need another temporary emergency shelter?

The primary purpose of this shelter space is to replace the overnight beds that were previously provided by the Fountain Community Church during the last three winters. The need for emergency overnight shelter tends to increase during the winter months and is predicted that it will exceed existing capacity unless we plan to add these additional beds.

What about more permanent solutions to the homelessness problem?

Unfortunately, we are still in a position where emergency overnight shelters are needed. This temporary shelter is not a long-term solution to homelessness or housing needs and does not supplant any of the City's existing efforts. The City continues to provide permanent low-income and homeless housing through the Bellingham Home Fund and other funding sources. To read more about what the City is doing for housing and human services, visit <https://www.cob.org/services/housing/Pages/default.aspx>.

Why did the City choose the Civic Field location for an overnight women's shelter?

The primary reason the Civic Stadium locker room building is being considered is that we have control of the space and it is not in use during these winter months. The second reason is that it already has all the necessary amenities: potable water, toilets, showers, heating, and outdoor lighting. It is also accessible to those with mobility limitations. The building will not require any major conversion to operate the women's shelter.

The former shelter operators, human services professionals, the Mayor and City staff believe it's a very good solution and are grateful we have it. No other community groups were able to offer an alternative location to Fountain Community Church. Staff explored a number of other City-owned sites and none were as well suited as Civic Stadium locker room.

What types of security measures will be in place? What about drug and alcohol use?

The shelter will be run by professional staff managed by the Opportunity Council. All staff will receive de-escalation training, provided by the Bellingham Police Department. The women's winter shelter will be required to adhere to all safety and security conditions within the City's temporary shelter code ([BMC 20.15.030](#)). Specifically, this includes a prohibition on drugs, alcohol, or firearms on-site. All guests will be required to sign a code of conduct, outlining the behavioral expectations during their stay.

Any guests whose behavior presents a problem for staff or volunteers can be disallowed from returning to the shelter for a period of time. Repeated or serious violations of the code of conduct will result in an individual being permanently barred. These policies are consistent with the previous winter overnight shelter guidelines that were used at the Fountain Community Church, and there were very few incidents that required police intervention during the three previous years.

Will guests be drug tested before they can come to the shelter?

No. This is an emergency overnight shelter where potential guests will check in by 6:00 pm nightly to be assigned a bed for the evening. It is not required or feasible to conduct blood or urine analyses on all guests on a nightly basis. The primary goal is to provide a safe, warm place to sleep during the coldest months of the year. Any guests that is intoxicated to the point that their behavior presents a problem may be prohibited from spending the night at the women's emergency shelter that evening.

How will the proposed shelter impact sporting events, community recreational use, and other activities at Civic Field?

The proposed shelter will not impact sporting events, community recreational use, or any other activities at Civic Field. The locker room building at Civic Stadium is unused in the winter months when the shelter will be operational. Access to the locker room building will be fenced off from the athletic facilities, and there will be no changes in open hours or public programming due to the presence of the shelter.

Will shelter guests be allowed to congregate at the Civic Field complex during the day?

No. All shelter guests must leave the premises between the hours of 8:00 am and 6:00 pm. Check-in for the women's winter shelter will be at the Lighthouse Mission Ministry's Drop-In center on Holly Street. After screening and check-in, guests will be transported by van to the women's winter shelter at Civic Stadium. They will be returned back to the Drop-In Center in the morning for breakfast.

What about men? It seems like all the resources are for families with children.

The City is working with Whatcom County, the Lighthouse Mission, and other service providers to make sure there is coordinated shelter services this winter. Providing a winter shelter for women opens up capacity for more men in other shelters. This makes the most efficient use of our limited resources.

What ages of children will be allowed at the shelter?

There have been no age restrictions discussed, and it is not certain that any mothers with children will be placed in the shelter. Families with children have more resources available to them, including motel vouchers and other family-specific shelter spaces. The City has a contract with the Opportunity Council to place families in motels during the winter months; this is our primary strategy.

The biggest need we have in our community is more space for single adults. In the event of extenuating circumstances, there is one separate room where a woman with a child or children could stay until other accommodations are made.