



Pacific Building Shelter Project

(a.k.a. SK Emergency Housing Program or Mile Hill Shelter)

Frequently Asked Questions



Prepared by the Kitsap County Department of Human Services

BUILDING PURCHASE QUESTIONS

- 1. Where did the idea to purchase the Olympic Fitness building come from?**

Kitsap County's Homeless Crisis Response and Housing Plan includes an action step to increase the number of emergency housing beds available in different geographic areas of the county, including in South Kitsap. County staff researched possible locations for more than a year but finding a suitable facility for sale has been difficult. A real estate agent alerted us that the Olympic Fitness building was on the market. After due diligence, Kitsap County entered into an agreement with the building owner and the sale closed on April 14, 2021.
- 2. How is the building purchase and program being paid for?**

Kitsap County received federal and state grants to increase the number of emergency housing beds. In addition, some County funding that is dedicated to addressing homelessness will be used. A combination of these funds is being used to 1) purchase and rehab the facility, and then 2) to operate the housing program.
- 3. Who will own and maintain the building?**

Kitsap County will maintain ownership of the building and contract with a non-profit to provide services within the facility. Kitsap County will make improvements to the building, including installing a fire sprinkler and alarm system, upgrades for ADA accessibility, substantial roof repairs, and addressing health and safety issues.
- 4. What is the timeline for the building to be occupied?**

Kitsap County has hired an architecture and engineering firm, Rice Fergus Miller, to determine what work needs to be done to assure the building complies with codes, secure permits for the improvements, and meet the grant funding requirements for occupancy. We anticipate occupancy in Spring - Summer 2023.
- 5. What county permitting is required for this program?**

The County has to follow all the same permitting requirements as any other project. This includes submitting the permits that are required for land use, site development, and building upgrades. The Kitsap County Department of Community Development will administer the permit process and ensure compliance with all county codes.

PROGRAM QUESTIONS

- 6. What is the plan for using the building?**

The building will provide emergency housing beds and serve residents seven days a week around the clock. It will provide residents with meals, laundry, personal hygiene, and safe storage for their possessions. Residents can also access and engage with other services such as health care, housing assistance, mental health, substance use treatment, and job placement. Staff will develop individual plans with each resident including specific steps needed to attain permanent stable housing again.

7. Who will manage the program?

Kitsap County will initially contract with the Kitsap Rescue Mission to operate this program. The Kitsap Rescue Mission has gained significant experience with operating a similar program over the past year at the Kitsap County Fairgrounds Pavilion in Silverdale and at the Quality Inn in Bremerton. Government funding of this program prohibits requiring any residents to participate in religious activities.

8. Who will be housed there?

This facility will be available to single adults, couples, and families who are experiencing a housing crisis, and seeking temporary emergency housing. Referrals will be made by our county's one-stop housing referral service, the Housing Solutions Center.

9. How will this facility be staffed?

A minimum of three Kitsap Rescue Mission staff will be onsite during the day, and two staff awake overnight. The program includes a full-time program manager, case managers, and a mental health specialist. All staff receive training in best practices, de-escalation techniques, safety protocols, and trauma-informed care.

10. How many people will be housed there?

This depends on two factors: how many occupants are allowed, as determined by the Department of Community Development; and the number of residents that can be accommodated by the Kitsap Rescue Mission program. Currently, we anticipate about 75 residents.

11. Will drug use be allowed?

No. Residents must sign a rules and conduct agreement before entering the housing program. The rules include a "good neighbor" code of conduct and forbid the use of drugs and alcohol in the building and on the grounds.

12. How long will residents typically stay there?

There is no time limit for residency. The residents will work with their case managers to develop housing stability plans. The goal is for individuals to find permanent stable housing as quickly as possible. This often depends on the availability of affordable housing within the larger community.

13. Will this be like programs where people line up every night to get in?

No, once enrolled in this emergency housing program, the person is no longer homeless. They have a reserved spot, and can stay in the facility 24/7; so, there will not be people "lining up" to get in. Those who are not enrolled in the program offered in the building have no access to the facility or services. This is not a "drop-in" services program.

14. What "case management" will be provided?

Each resident will work with Kitsap Rescue Mission staff to develop a housing stability plan (and address how to overcome their current barriers to permanent stable housing). In addition, residents can access a wide range of support services, including medical and mental health, treatment programs, and employment support and placement. The goal is to help each resident return to permanent stable housing and live as independently as possible as soon as they are able.

15. Will people be allowed to have their pets in the shelter?

Yes, the shelter is being designed to accommodate people and their pets. Many people experiencing homelessness have an animal as part of their family and do not want to give up their pet to be able to participate in a shelter program. The building renovation includes areas that are being designed to accommodate pets, in consultation with the Kitsap Humane Society, the ASPCA, and area veterinarians. The plans also include a fenced dog run area outside.

16. What does it mean that the shelter will be “low-barrier?”

“Low-barrier” means that the program tries to reduce the barriers for people needing shelter to stay there. Low-barrier programs emphasize welcoming people as they are, while having clear and simple behavioral expectations. For example, by allowing people to bring their pets, it “lowers a barrier” that might otherwise prevent someone with a pet from being allowed to stay. Other ways that this program will lower barriers is by opening the shelter to couples (many other shelters are single gender only), bringing medical care providers to the site, not requiring any participation in religious activities, and not doing income verification or credit checks. However, “low-barrier” doesn’t mean low standards or no rules. Guests need to follow the shelter rules, behave respectfully and not be disruptive to others, and possession and use of drugs and alcohol are not allowed.

NEIGHBORHOOD QUESTIONS

17. What type of security will there be?

Upon opening of the facility, the County intends to contract with a professional private security company to provide on-site staff to ensure that people who are not authorized to be on the property are not causing issues. This is similar to what has been successful at the Quality Inn program over the last year. Over time, we will evaluate whether this continues to be needed.

In addition, County Sheriff representatives and county staff have reviewed the site for security camera placement. Security cameras have been installed inside and outside, with 24/7 monitoring. The onsite staff will be trained regarding security measures, as well as for de-escalation, trauma- informed care, health/first aid, and person-centered relationships to help prevent security issues.

18. If I have an issue with the program operations, can I call someone to address it?

Yes. There will be a direct phone number for neighbors to contact should any issues arise.

19. Will this be an added burden to our first responders in Port Orchard?

We expect this program to be positive for first responders and the facility has the support of the Kitsap County Sheriff’s Department and South Kitsap Fire and Rescue. They currently have little recourse when responding to people living outdoors. This facility and program offer additional resources to address these challenges. Experience shows that people with chronic health conditions can better stabilize when they are housed; and this will result in fewer emergency calls.

20. Won’t this result in more homeless people coming to the neighborhood?

Several encampments already exist in the South Kitsap area, and providing this housing program is intended to reduce the number of people visibly living outdoors. Once individuals are enrolled in this emergency housing program, they are no longer homeless. They have access to food, hygiene facilities, laundry, medical care, and other services; and do not need to seek them in the surrounding area.

People who are not enrolled in the building's program cannot access the facility or services. This will not be a "drop in" program -- so there is little incentive for them to hang around the property or the neighborhood.

21. Will this program serve people from the Port Orchard area?

Initially, some residents of the Current Kitsap Rescue Mission program will move to this location and some will move to other facilities around the county. The residents at the KRM program have come from all over Kitsap County, including South Kitsap. The South Kitsap program will launch with some openings available for people to be referred specifically from the Port Orchard area.

We know that many individuals do not want to leave the community they are familiar with, so expect many residents will be relatively local; and we hope that many currently living on nearby streets and parks will become (temporary) residents of this facility.

22. Will people be loitering around the property?

Program residents can access the fenced back yard and will be discouraged from loitering around the property. Because this program can provide outdoor access for residents, it can limit gatherings elsewhere on the property. The large fenced outdoor space is one of the benefits of this facility.

Only people who are enrolled in the program will be able to access the facility – there will not be lines of people waiting to enter the facility – only those who are in the program will be admitted. People who show up and are not part of the program will be directed to the Housing Solutions Center for enrollment in this or another program, depending on availability.

23. Will this program lead to people camping in the woods around the property?

There was evidence of camping in wooded areas adjacent to the property when Kitsap County assumed ownership of the property. Under Kitsap County ownership, people will not be allowed to camp in the wooded areas on the property.

24. Will the facility receive additional fencing?

Yes. We intend to repair/replace sections of the existing fence along the West side of the property (where it borders residences) where it is falling down, in disrepair, or does not exist. Additionally, we plan to install a fence around the backyard of the property to discourage access to/from the adjacent wooded area and neighboring properties. This will be a visual barrier as well as physical barrier.

25. Where can I find more information about this project?

More information is available at the webpage that was set up for this project:

www.kcowa.us/skhousing