

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NEWS RELEASE: Old Town shelter will remain open through summer — serving as temporary bridge amid ongoing work to give vaccines

PORTLAND (April 20) — To ensure shelter capacity remains stable while work is under way to vaccinate people experiencing homelessness from COVID-19, a temporary shelter at Old Town's former Greyhound Station will remain open through September, the City of Portland/Multnomah County Joint Office of Homeless Services has announced.

The shelter will continue to serve about 90 people in a physically distanced space, and it will continue to operate as a 24-hour facility and be available through reservations only. The shelter will also continue to prioritize people currently living without shelter in Old Town/Chinatown, as well as people with disabilities, veterans and seniors.

On May 1, operations and management of the shelter will shift from Transition Projects to Do Good Multnomah. Do Good Multnomah had operated a winter shelter at Charles Jordan Community Center that closed as planned in March. Transition Projects stepped up to develop and open the former Greyhound site shelter in November.

"We're excited to have the opportunity to continue sheltering and supporting folks at the Downtown Physical Distancing Shelter," said Andy Goebel, Director of Emergency Management for Do Good Multnomah. "Our partnership with Portland Parks and Recreation made it possible for us to keep people safely sheltered at the Charles Jordan Community Center from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic up until this move, and we're thankful for the chance to continue that work in this new facility."

There are no plans to use the former Greyhound site as a long-term, permanent shelter beyond what's needed to protect people from COVID-19.

But in the short-term, the 30,000-square-foot space will serve as a crucial part of the Joint Office's work to preserve shelter capacity while also protecting people experiencing homelessness from the effects of the virus.

Not only has the Joint Office been able to maintain shelter capacity throughout its system, but the shelter system has yet to report any significant COVID-19 outbreaks.

Since March 2020, the Joint Office has maintained overall bed capacity by spreading beds from existing long-term shelters into makeshift spaces. Initially, that meant using community centers and the Oregon Convention Center. It also meant working with partners to open and support three outdoor shelters.

But by the summer and fall of 2020, the Joint Office was able to evolve its shelter response.

The Joint Office moved beds from those initial temporary spaces into six separate motels, managed by shelter providers, with rooms prioritized for people most at risk of serious COVID-19 infections. The Joint Office and partners also invested in enhancing the outdoor shelters so they could operate in all seasons, and in all weather conditions.

“For more than a year now, we have done everything we can to protect people experiencing homelessness in our community from COVID-19 outbreaks — while also keeping up our work providing shelter, rent assistance, support services and street outreach,” said Marc Jolin, director of the Joint Office. “That work is every bit as critical today. And keeping the Downtown Physical Distancing Shelter open will help us through this next phase of the pandemic.”

Funding for the extended operations is coming from Multnomah County contingency funds.

As more people are vaccinated, and pending any corresponding declines in case counts in Multnomah County, the Joint Office will move people from temporary shelters back to its original, pre-COVID-19 spaces.

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