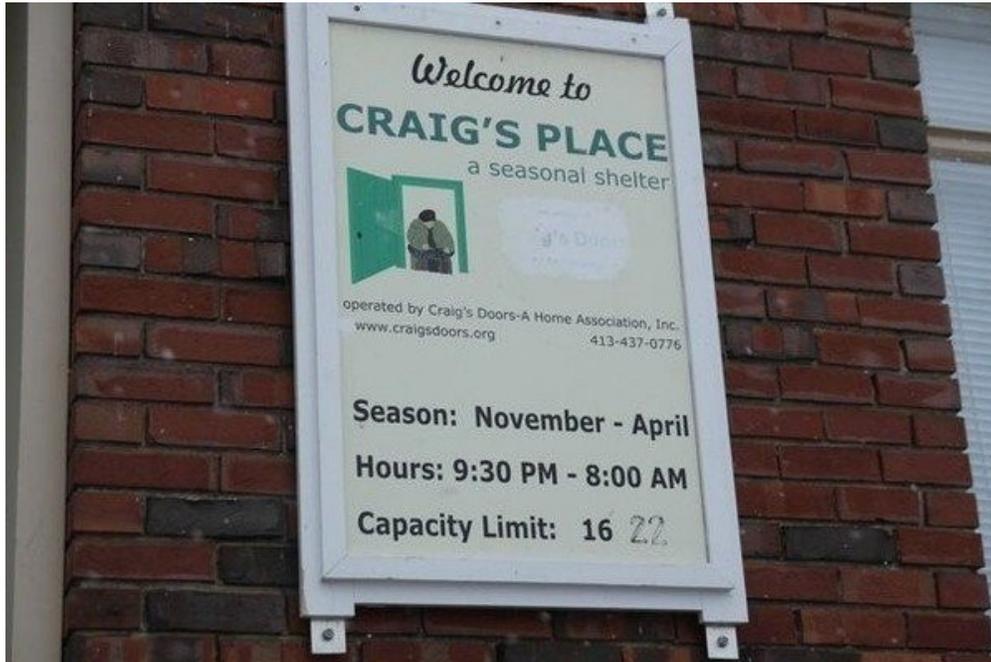


Seasonal homeless shelters open Thursday; need still surpasses supply

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Craig's Place in Amherst is one of several seasonal shelters set to open to provide more beds for people who are homeless. (Republican file)

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By **Diane Lederman**, dlederman@repub.com

People who are homeless in Amherst are counting down the days until the seasonal shelter opens Thursday, said Jade Lovett, co-director of Craig's Place.

With October's cold and rainy weather, people who are homeless have been looking for places to stay warm.



"There's a group of people who consider Amherst home," and have been staying in town all year, she said. They're eager for the seasonal shelter to open at the First Baptist Church, offering 22 beds for men and six for women.

Other seasonal shelters are opening in Northampton and Cambridge.

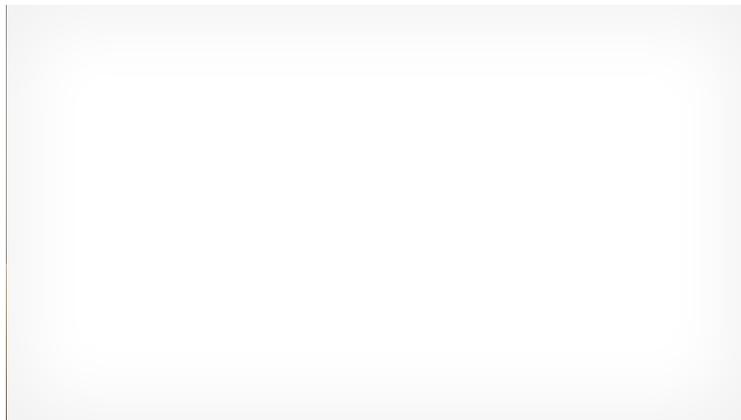
Kelly Turley, associate director for the Boston-based Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, is glad for the additional beds. Most shelters are year-round -- but some are limited by funding or college calendars and only open for six months.

While she doesn't know the total number of beds the seasonal shelters will offer, they help, she said.

"We see far too many people who are staying outside," or staying in laundromats or emergency rooms, she said. The seasonal shelters will give them the option to have a bed and food.

"It can be life or death otherwise," she said.

But the seasonal shelters fill up fast. Lovett said last year the Amherst shelter was virtually full every night and had to turn people away.



She said staff refer people to the Interfaith Cot Shelter in Northampton -- but that 20-bed shelter is often full as well. That shelter has a six-bed overflow shelter in Easthampton. It usually fills up, too.



Occasionally Craig's Place staff will refer people to the year-round Friends of the Homeless shelter in Springfield "if there's no other option."

Craig's Place operates a resource center, and Lovett said staff are seeing a more vulnerable subset of people seeking shelter: more 18-year-olds and more people 65 and older. Those older people are the chronically homeless "who can't find affordable housing," she said.

The state has come through with an anticipated \$175,000 for Craig's Place. While that's a relief, Lovett said, it "is not enough to provide the quality of services we want to provide." She said staff have been holding fundraisers and will continue to raise money to augment state funding. Previous funding was \$200,000, and she's unsure if the shelter will receive that amount.

Budgets at the other shelters are holding steady.

The Harvard Square Homeless Shelter in Cambridge offers 24 beds, with 19 for men and five for women. It can boost that number by five depending on the temperature and weather, said Ethan Kahn, a Harvard student and one of 29 staff who operate the shelter, which is open through April 15.



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The shelter, unlike Amherst, is a dry shelter, meaning those under the influence of intoxicants are not allowed inside. The Amherst shelter is behavior-based, meaning guests don't have to be sober, but must



conform to the shelter rules.

People are admitted on a lottery basis and have access to a bed for 14 days, Kahn said. Many prefer the Cambridge shelter to the larger year-round shelters in Boston. And with a stable of 150-200 volunteers in addition to the staff, "there's a great staff (to client) ratio ... a more tranquil environment."

This will be Kahn's third season at the shelter, and he is looking forward to the opening. "I find it meaningful," he said of the work. "It's an important part of my experience."

While ServiceNet operates permanent shelters in Western Massachusetts, it also offers two seasonal shelters. Beside the Interfaith Shelter, it operates a 20-bed shelter at Barton's Crossing in Pittsfield in addition to the 16-year-round beds.

ServiceNet also offers a permanent shelter in Greenfield and at the Grove Street Inn in Northampton.

Jay Sacchetti, ServiceNet senior vice president of shelter and housing, said he expects Thursday will be a busy night at the cot shelter.

"They'll be lined up at the door," he said.



He said outreach workers have been out visiting campsites to ask if people will be coming in so they can plan. And they are ready.



"We are in pretty good shape in Northampton," he said. "I think that shelter has such a long history we are usually able to get the staff in there."

He said ServiceNet is still working out funding for Barton's Crossing and that shelter likely will open Dec. 1. He said Soldier On, which has 10 beds in Pittsfield, will be open for November. He said the Pittsfield shelter typically gets busy in December.

ServiceNet had been hoping to add 12 to 14 seasonal beds in Greenfield beginning in November. But the organization is running into budget issues, Sacchetti said. He doesn't know when it might open. The agency was trying to renovate the second floor above its current 20-bed year-round shelter on Wells Street, but needs to meet town codes in order to do that.

"There' so many issues created by building codes," he said. "They drive the expense of rehab through the roof."

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