

Shelter must find new site

Landlord says he won't negotiate after incident

CLAIRE GALVIN

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

WILLIMANTIC — It appears the Windham Region No Freeze Project Inc. will be displaced from its current location at 75 Bridge St. sooner rather than later.

As a result, it is urgently seeking a new home, unlike what was originally announced back in October.

According to a release issued by shelter board member Allison Heneghan, the landlord at the plaza has asked the seasonal shelter that operates between November and April to leave by Dec. 31.

According to Windham Region No Freeze Project Executive Director Avery Lenhart, the landlord, Michael Haddad, originally offered to let the shelter rent January through April on a month-by-month basis after its lease expired until the shelter closed in April.

However, a threatening incident that happened in early December made him change his

mind, Lenhart said.

The program's lease agreement states the no-freeze shelter has the option to extend its lease for up to three years at the end of the current lease and the current lease expires on Dec. 31.

Heneghan, however, said the landlord is not honoring the program's lease option, forcing shelter officials to scramble for a new site.

According to the release Haddad blamed the eviction on an incident that happened somewhere in the plaza, but not in front of, or close to the No Freeze space.

Haddad confirmed the incident occurred in front of the Willimantic Records store, two doors down from the shelter.

The incident involved a person who stayed at the shelter one night, coming to Willimantic from New Haven.

Lenhart said the incident involved a guest loitering in the afternoon hours and refusing to leave the plaza and threatening

NO-FREEZE SHELTER, Page 4



The lease on the Windham No Freeze Project's shelter on Bridge Street expires at the end of the month, forcing shelter operators to frantically search for a new site. Claire Galvin | Staff

No-freeze shelter must find new site

Continued from Page 1

Haddad's adult son with a knife.

Willimantic Police Department Lt. Matthew Solak confirmed the arrest on Thursday.

Kihe Mcgaha, 35, was charged with second-degree breach of peace around 5 p.m. Dec. 4.

According to the release, when No Freeze management became aware of the incident, the "assailant" was permanently banned from ever using the No Freeze program again.

Lenhart said the incident happened Dec. 4. On Dec. 5, the landlord served them with the eviction notice.

"I told him he knew that was impossible for us," Lenhart said. "We have no intention of shutting down, we have every intention to negotiate with (Haddad). I firmly believe he will be willing to negotiate when we meet with him."

The No Freeze Project has officially requested remedi-

ation with the landlord to try to negotiate a reasonable exit at the end of the 2019-20 season in April.

Lenhart said Haddad had not responded to the negotiation letter yet, which she believed he received Wednesday.

When reached Thursday, Haddad said he had no intention of negotiating.

"I've had enough, my kids have had enough, and the other tenants have had enough," Haddad said. "I've housed them for 10 years. They were a good tenant, the people that were staying there weren't always so nice."

Haddad said he understood that few properties in town want to house or even be neighbors with the shelter.

"The shelter has been in four of my buildings for the past 10 years," Haddad said. "I've been very nice to the shelter for 10 years. And no one else in this town has. The police don't like it here, the town doesn't like it here."

In its 16-year history, the No Freeze Project has operated in five different locations within Willimantic, including 75 Bridge St.

Because of the eviction notice, the No Freeze Project may need a temporary space to house the shelter and other programs until a permanent location can be identified and purchased or leased.

According to town planning and zoning guidelines, the only suitable zoning districts for the homeless program are B4 and B1a districts.

The new space needs to be big enough to accommodate all services, or about 3,000 square feet, and be within walking distance of other community programs like the Covenant Soup Kitchen, Generations, the Windham Area Interfaith Ministry, Access Agency, Perception Programs, United Services and others.

The desired permanent location would involve a building the nonprofit could

own and not be displaced from.

In addition to overnight housing from November through April, the No Freeze operates a drop-in center where guests can register for services, access shower facilities and personal hygiene items and establish alliances with local human services organizations.

During the 2018-19 season, the shelter completed intakes, assessments and navigation services for more than 300 people, delivered diversion funding that prevented at least 45 people from becoming homeless provided emergency shelter for 143 adults and successfully and permanently housed 98 people.

It's run mainly on donations and private foundation grants. All donations are tax deductible.

For more information or to discuss space, call the shelter at 860-450-1346.

Follow Claire Galvin on Twitter - @CGalvinTC.