



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

THROUGH: Stephanie Hayden-Howard, Assistant City Manager *Stephanie Hayden-Howard*

FROM: Adrienne Sturup, Director, Austin Public Health *Adrienne Sturup*
Dianna Grey, Homeless Strategy Officer *Dianna Grey*

DATE: March 7, 2023

SUBJECT: Closure of The Salvation Army Downtown Shelter & Social Services Center

On February 17th, The Salvation Army Austin Area Command ('The Salvation Army' or TSA) made an announcement on the organization's [website](#) that it would be closing the doors of its downtown shelter on March 15th, reporting that they could no longer continue to offer the desired level and quality of care due to the age and condition of the facility.

Background

The Salvation Army operates three local shelters for people experiencing homelessness, including the Downtown Shelter & Social Services Center (SSC), the Austin Shelter for Women and Children (ASWC), and the Rathgeber Center.

The Salvation Army opened its Downtown Shelter and Social Services Center in 1988. Until early 2020, the shelter had a total bed capacity of 242, serving men, women and families. In February 2020, The Salvation Army moved all families with children to the newly opened Rathgeber Center, converting the downtown facility to an adults-only shelter. In April 2020, when over 30 clients and staff tested positive for COVID-19, the SSC closed for a short time for deep cleaning, bed reconfiguration and individual isolation/quarantining. Pre-COVID capacity has never been fully restored, and the shelter currently provides services to approximately 50 men and 50 women nightly. Additionally, the Safe Sleep program operates out of the SSC and can provide approximately 10 women with walk-up emergency shelter on any given night. The City does not own or control the shelter property, but has provided modest funding to support the shelter's operations for several years.

The Austin Shelter for Women and Children (ASWC), operated by The Salvation Army since 2001, serves women with children and single women. The total capacity is 81. Due to the configuration of beds in smaller rooms and more dedicated bathrooms in this shelter, capacity was not significantly impacted by the pandemic. This City owned building was built in 1935 and renovated with City of Austin bond funding in 2018, resulting in expanded capacity, upgraded facilities, a new childcare center, and improvements to accessibility for people with disabilities. ASWC operations are fully funded by the City.

The Rathgeber Center, which The Salvation Army opened in February 2020, serves families with children experiencing homelessness. This facility holds 120 beds in 42 private rooms and 92 beds in 23 extended stay suites varying in size. Total capacity is 212. The City provided one-time funding of \$1 million to the Rathgeber Center upon its opening through May of 2021.

The Salvation Army is a critical partner in the Austin/Travis County homeless response system, receiving federal funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the State of Texas, and the City of Austin to provide emergency shelter, rapid rehousing, basic needs and other services for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. They are a partner in the Best Single Source Plus (BSS+) Collaborative, a multi-agency program providing rapid rehousing services, fully funded by the City of Austin. Austin Public Health partnered with The Salvation Army to serve as the fiscal agent in providing direct financial assistance to individuals and families impacted by Hurricane Harvey.

Overview of City Contracting Relationship with The Salvation Army

The City of Austin has contracted with The Salvation Army for over 20 years to provide emergency shelter and trauma informed services to the Austin/Travis County community. Over the last 10 years, the City has increased contracted support of their overall programming. Contracted support includes emergency shelter services at the Austin Shelter for Women and Children, the Rathgeber Center and the Downtown Shelter, as well as childcare services and tenant-based rental assistance program, totaling over \$26.7 million.

As of March 3, 2023, The Salvation Army has expended 100% of their City general fund and ARPA funded 2022/2023 contracts. Austin Public Health intends to repurpose the FY24 General and ARPA funds due to the closure of the Downtown Shelter.

Displacement of Downtown Shelter Clients

Upon announcing the impending closure of the shelter, The Salvation Army (TSA) reported that it would “make sure everyone in the downtown shelter is relocated and continues to have access to the care and services they need.” Austin Public Health Director Adrienne Sturup and Homeless Strategy Officer Dianna Grey met with TSA on February 23rd, where they indicated that they hoped to transfer some clients to other local shelter providers, to support the reunification of others with family members outside of Austin, and to offer clients the option of transferring to TSA shelters in other cities.

The general shortage of shelter beds in the community, combined with the compressed timeline from announcement to closure of the shelter, raise concerns that TSA may not meet its commitment to connect clients to alternate shelter and services. As of March 6th, TSA reported that, not including women who drop in for the Safe Sleep Program, there are 64 shelter guests remaining at the shelter.

The City has been in near-daily dialogue with TSA during this process, exploring options to support a responsible relocation process.

- TSA has agreed to prioritize ensuring that all clients have a Coordinated Assessment before March 15th. HSD will support coordination with service providers as needed.
- TSA is considering recommendations that they move as many single women as possible to the Austin Women and Children's Shelter, and that they provide modest additional funding for other nonprofits that can accommodate TSA clients.
- TSA has declined a recommendation that they delay closing the shelter for at least a week beyond March 15th, as well as a request that Salvation Army consider providing overnight staffing for a short period of time if an alternate location could be found for anyone not relocated at the time of closure. The organization has also indicated that it is not open to leasing the facility back to the City of Austin while it positions the property for sale.

Next Steps

Austin Public Health will provide an update at the Public Health Committee meeting on Wednesday, March 8th. The Salvation Army has been invited to the meeting to answer Council Member questions. The Homeless Strategy Division will provide the City Manager with updates on client relocation efforts from today through March 15th.

cc Jesús Garza, Interim City Manager
 Rodney Gonzales, Assistant City Manager
 Laura Huffman, Consultant, Management Services