

Temporary housing for homeless proposed in Belfast church

by Sasha Ray, Bangor Daily News

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FILE - United Methodist Church on Mill Lane in Belfast. (Michael York / BDN file)

BELFAST, Maine ([BDN](#)) -- An organization that serves homeless people in the midcoast has proposed converting the lower level of a Belfast church into a transitional housing program that would provide shelter and services for three to four families at a time.

City councilors discussed the proposal at their meeting on Tuesday night, but they held off on deciding whether to send the proposal from the Midcoast Maine Homeless Coalition to the Planning Board for further review, noting they had lingering questions about it.

Councilors commended the coalition on its progress so far, but raised numerous questions and concerns about the proposal, such as what training would be provided to volunteers at the shelter, what transportation would be available for its residents and the length of time families could stay on site.

“Having heard what we have tonight and having read what we are given, my first instinct is [that] the group has some loose ends that really need to be tied up,” Councilor Mary Mortier

said. “It’s a great thing you’ve brought forward for us. It’s a great way to start our 2025, but there’s some serious work that needs to be brought forth in short order.”

The proposal comes as people across the midcoast and Maine have struggled with increasing housing insecurity in recent years, in part related to the growing cost of renting and buying housing.

As proposed, the transitional housing program would provide lodging, food and supportive services for up to 15 people at a time in the lower level of the United Methodist Church on Mill Lane on the east side of the city, according to documents provided to councilors on Tuesday night.

The goal of the program is to provide families with stability and support as they seek permanent housing.

“It’s a model like a spoke on wheels where we all work together. Three families is a lot of families. We’re really going to impact a lot of people,” said Mary Sullivan, who is involved with the Midcoast Maine Homeless Coalition, during the meeting Tuesday night.

The coalition says that the program would follow federal guidelines for transitional housing programs, including screening families before they enter and requiring them to sign an agreement to work with case managers and, as necessary, receive mental health and substance abuse counseling.

For it to be approved, the proposal must eventually go to the Planning Board because the city does not currently have rules specifically allowing transitional housing or homeless shelters, according to Bub Fournier, director of the planning and codes department. The board would need to determine where in the city could be rezoned for such uses.

Following the discussion, Mayor Eric Sanders said he’s “pre-cautiously optimistic” about it. “My sense of the room is that we’re all intrigued by this.”