

Making Room: Belfast fast-tracks a transitional housing proposal for families

By [Jim Leonard](#), March 12, 2025

A transitional housing facility was approved in first reading by the Belfast City Council at its March 4 meeting. The facility, proposed by Midcoast Maine Homeless Coalition, will be located here at the Belfast United Methodist Church at 23 Mill Lane.

A housing project proposed by Midcoast Maine Homeless Coalition (MMHC) moved another step forward at the March 4 meeting of the Belfast City Council.

Councilors unanimously approved a proposed ordinance change that would allow a transitional housing facility at 23 Mill Lane, home of the Belfast United Methodist Church.

The council first discussed the proposed transitional housing facility at its Jan. 7 meeting. At that time councilors and Codes and Planning Director Bub Fournier gave the project supporters specific questions to answer before the next council meeting.

At the same time, the council directed city staff to work on the necessary ordinance amendments to include allowance of the proposed facility for review by the Belfast Planning Board.

The Planning Board reviewed the changes to the City Code to facilitate the proposal, reaching consensus on most of the standards that staff identified, including the requirement of an annual city license for any Transitional Housing Facility. Additionally, there is a requirement to submit a description of how the bathroom might function for any such housing facility.

Transitional housing is generally defined as accommodation for people who may need longer housing while looking for permanent housing. The MMHC proposal identifies the program as “transitional,” as opposed to a homeless shelter, which provides “temporary overnight housing.”

“This is not a [homeless] shelter,” MMHC Chair Kathy Muzzy said at the Jan. 7 council meeting. “It would provide stable, overnight housing for three to four families, not individuals, not people coming in off the street.”

Muzzy told the council that families housed there would receive meals and necessary services required to transition to a more permanent living situation. Computer access will be provided to allow family members to register for programs and fill out necessary applications.

The program would be available only to Belfast families experiencing housing instability. The facility would be staffed by two employees (one full-time, one part-time) and volunteers 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The proposed program is modeled after the national program Family Promise, with one notable exception. Muzzy told councilors that Family Promise programming is aimed at large urban centers, while the proposed MMHC program is designed to support families in Belfast.

During the public hearing on the ordinance amendment, neighbors of the proposed project offered support, saying they support “people trying to gain permanence.”

Fournier acknowledged the assistance his office has received since the proposal arose and also noted it was unique.

“This particular process has been so well-vetted by the council,” Fournier said. “We built the [amendment] to review another [similar] project, if it should come. However, this facility is zoned specifically.”

Councilor Mary Mortier noted the significance of the amendment.

“This particular ordinance is a guinea pig, a test case,” she said. “It’s for one particular facility in one part of Belfast.

Muzzy thanked the council and city staff for “engaging in this process and going above and beyond.”

With the ordinance amendment approved in first reading, a second reading will take place at the March 18 council meeting. For now, MMHC will continue working through the Planning Board review process while preparing to launch the transitional housing facility.

In other business, Belfast Economic Development Director Thomas Kittredge received council authorization to issue Requests for Responses for Architectural and Engineering Services for the proposed Public Safety Building.

The next meeting of the Belfast City Council will be March 18. The March 4 council meeting can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/1060686251>.