



City of Aurora

44 E. Downer Place
Aurora, IL 60505
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Legistar History Report

File Number: 25-0984

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**General
Ledger #:**

In Control: Building, Zoning,
and Economic
Development
Committee

File Created: 11/26/2025

File Name: City of Aurora / 712 S River St / Conditional Use for
Social Services / temporary emergency warming
shelter

Final Action:

Title: An Ordinance Granting a Conditional Use Permit for a Social Service
Agencies, Charitable Organizations, Health Related Facilities, and similar
uses when not operated for pecuniary profit (6630) Use to allow an
emergency warming shelter on the Property located at 712 S. River Street

Notes:

Sponsors:

Enactment Date:

Attachments: Exhibit "A" Legal Description, Maps

Enactment Number:

Planning Case #: AU28/4-25.375-CU

Hearing Date:

Drafter: tvacek@aurora-il.org

Effective Date:

History of Legislative File

Ver- sion:	Acting Body:	Date:	Action:	Sent To:	Due Date:	Return Date:	Result:
1	Planning and Zoning Commission	12/03/2025	Held in Planning Commission		01/07/2026		Pass
	Action Text: A motion was made by Mrs. Martinez, seconded by Mr. Lee, that this agenda item be Held in Planning Commission. The motion carried.						
	Notes: <i>Chairman Pilmer said I would ask for a motion to extend this until our next meeting.</i>						
	<i>MOTION TO HOLD THIS ITEM UNTIL NEXT MEETING WAS MADE BY: Mrs. Martinez</i>						
	<i>MOTION SECONDED BY: Mr. Lee</i>						
	<i>AYES: Chairman Pilmer, Mr. Gonzales, Mr. Kuehl, Mr. Lee, Mrs. Martinez, Mr. Pickens, and Mr.</i>						
	<i>Roberts</i>						
	<i>NAYS: 0</i>						
	<i>ABSTAIN: 0</i>						
	<i>Motion carried.</i>						
	<i>Chairman Pilmer said motion carries. This will move to our meeting in January. Any additional</i> <i>announcements?</i>						
	<i>Mr. Lee said question...will this be moved to the January meeting or the next meeting?</i>						

Mrs. Vacek said yes, this will be moved to the January meeting. We are not going to have a meeting on the 17th. So, it will be moved to the next meeting that we'll have which will be January 7th.

Aye: 7 Chairperson Pilmer, At Large Lee, At Large Gonzales, At Large Pickens, At Large Roberts, At Large Martinez and At Large Kuehl

2	Planning and Zoning Commission	01/07/2026	Forwarded	Building, Zoning, and Economic Development Committee	01/14/2026	Pass
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Action Text: A motion was made by Ms. Martinez, seconded by Mr. Roberts, that this agenda item be Forwarded to the Building, Zoning, and Economic Development Committee, on the agenda for 1/14/2026. The motion carried.

Notes: Mrs. Vacek said good evening. Tracey Vacek, Director of Zoning and Planning Division. The Subject Property is located at 712 S. River Street and is currently utilized...or was currently utilized as City offices with P Park and Recreation District zoning. The City of Aurora is requesting approval of a Conditional Use for a Social Service Agency use. Specifically, the Conditional Use is to seek approval to allow an emergency warming center for individuals who are unable to access other permanent shelter options. The shelter will be operated from November until either May 1st or the last day that the temperature is at or below 32 degrees, or when severe weather conditions are declared. It will be able to accommodate up to 64 individuals, including guests, staff, and volunteers to ensure the safety, effective management, and the appropriate supervision. Guest hours will be from 7:00 pm to 7:00 am, and staff and volunteers will be onsite as needed for preparation, coordination, and site management. I will turn it over...Shannon Cameron is here, our Chief of Staff, to go into a little bit more detail unless you have any questions for me.

Chairman Pilmer said any questions of Staff? Thank you.

Ms. Cameron said thank you, Tracey. Shannon Cameron, Chief of Staff, and I have...

Ms. Mullins said Nicole Mullins, Chief Community Services Officer.

Ms. Cameron said Nicole's department, which is Community Services, oversees the contracts that we have with the coming church who was bid out and awarded this contract to oversee the warming center. It has been in operation. We did our due diligence to knock doors, to talk to those neighbors, to post letters as well, knowing that this was coming down. The weather and the temperatures is what urged it along more quickly. It seems to be functioning quite well. We have not heard any complaints from the neighbors or surrounding areas. This is very close to Hesed House, just really down the street. Very shortly near, so they are used to unhoused guests in the area. But I am grateful that Community Services specifically, and some other organizations that were using the space moved out quickly so we could accommodate neighbors that have nowhere else to go to stay warm and be safe, get rest, and be fed.

Happy to answer any questions. As Tracey described it is how it's been operating. It is determined by the person that holds the contract when they're open. We just ask that it's open when it's 32 degrees or lower. This is a change from previous years. Previous years, we only opened our warming shelter when it was 15 degrees or lower. We felt this was a bit...looking at the humanity of it all, I would not want to sleep out when it's 20 degrees. So, you know, and looking at just the scientific data and medical data around when things like frostbite begin, it was important for us to move up that number a bit. It has been functioning. We've had, as you all know, some very cold days in December, more than we had anticipated. And luckily this week, we're warmer so it is currently not open right now, but most likely on Sunday or Saturday night, it will be open again. Happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have. That is also why Nicole is here, but it's been a great place for us, and we're just very grateful, again, to the departments that vacated quickly to make sure that we could keep our residents safe.

Chairman Pilmer said thank you. Any questions of Ms. Cameron or Ms. Mullins?

Mr. Pickens said question regarding...is this going to act like an overflow for Hesed House? Because don't they take people in? And are they overcrowded? Are they to max?

Ms. Cameron said great question. So, there's several people that can't go to Hesed House for a variety of reasons. At different times, depending on their capacity, you have to prove that you've been in the area for 3 months, or sometimes 6 months if there's a waiting list. There's also for other reasons:

they may have been kicked out of Hesed House or banned from Hesed House. So, we're meeting the needs of the folks that can't go to Hesed House. So, for example, their family shelter, you know, we do not house families at this, but we do help to get them shelter. We, the City, has some funds set aside to have families that bring in minor children, to set them up in a hotel and then work with other agencies to get them a more permanent sheltering solution. So, this, if people can go to Hesed House, we work with Hesed House to make sure they get there in that night. Otherwise, if they can't go to Hesed House, we work very closely with them. We have who is on the list that cannot be there, and we accept those into this shelter.

Mr. Pickens said and another question is is there any program that you're offering to these individuals to help them get out of this situation?

Ms. Cameron said so, the primary...what the primary goal is is to keep people safe, get them rest, and get them fed. But within that, there is a lot more. We...the contractor and the several volunteers, and other people that work there have offered clothing. They have offered things like winter boots and things like that. We have A.I.D. and Hesed House that are both partners, including ECHO Development Center and others that have come in to provide case management services as well so those that...they have a street outreach team. Many of them already know the people that are guests at the warming shelter, but some may not. We make sure to get them other services as well, and work with them to make sure if they're not wrapped into those services, that they will be. We have actually good news. A gentleman that was a guest of the warming center last year, and has been since we opened this year, is moving into housing this weekend. So, we do have some success stories like that. He's a working individual. He's been working, but he's been living out of his car and it's just too cold to run the car at night. So, he's been using our services, but now he's moving into his own apartment so that's exciting. So, there are...we do see that. I will say that is...it's a little too much to put on a temporary, just when winter, warming shelter to ask for all of that, but we try to wrap it around with as many great services that we already have in Aurora to help them as much as they're willing to be helped or have capacity at this time.

Mr. Pickens said what was the use of the building prior to this warming...

Ms. Cameron said so, originally this building was constructed for the Fox Valley Park District. The City came into ownership of that much later. We had most recently been using it as the Financial Empowerment Center, and so there was offices for that for our Innovation Department. So, some City offices were in there as well as some non-profits. Hesed House, for example, had an office in there but hadn't been using it. The YWCA had used it as an office and some storage facilities. Those contracts were coming up in December anyway, so we just kind of saw if we could escalate those, and they were willing to work with us so people could be sheltered. Oh yeah, and our Grants office was there. So, we found them new offices here in other City buildings.

Mr. Pickens said okay. So, the building was like office building...

Ms. Cameron said yeah, exactly.

Mr. Pickens said and so now it's turning into a bunk house?

Ms. Cameron said yeah, in some way. So, the 2nd floor is where people sleep overnight. We have what was a boardroom upstairs houses many of our gentlemen overnight, but we also use some of the offices as smaller rooms to house, for example, women, and then there's some other people that, you know, we have if overflow, we open up more of those offices upstairs. Downstairs is where we have a lot of supplies. That's where the check-in is. That's where they're registering new guests, things like that.

Mr. Pickens said what will be the capacity? What's the...

Ms. Cameron said so, the capacity is 64 with volunteers, with individuals. The most amount of guests we've had in one night was 50, and that was unique. Right now, it's usually between 30 and 40, and then we have also some...if some individuals come in late, like the police dropped them off...it can happen at any hour, the police are dropping off because they see someone out in the elements, they will bring them into the center and so although it's open to 7:00 am, we don't have a quick...we don't have a shut off. If people are in an emergency, we let them in at any hour of the night so there's always someone manning. And I will say, we also have 24-hour security...I mean, not 24-hour...when it's open, we have security always there on premises as well.

Mr. Pickens said okay. And is the sleeping situation where it's like Hesed House used to be with pads on the floor? And if you're lucky you got 2 pads?

Ms. Cameron said so, they have cots. So, everyone sleeps in a cot and they have blankets, and they get a meal. They get...at night...they get breakfast in the morning, and they actually have packed sandwiches they get to take with them.

Mr. Pickens said okay. How about toilet facilities, shower facilities, all that?

Ms. Cameron said so, unfortunately, there are no showers there. Something we wish we could provide but that is not what the building has. There are 2 restrooms upstairs and 2 downstairs. There's multi stalls downstairs and single, unisex bathrooms upstairs. We do laundry offsite. Hesed House allows us to launder all the blankets and things like that through them. Hesed House has also volunteered their kitchen when we need it. We work with Oswego, actually, Senior Center has volunteered to open up their showers if people need it. We can, you know, there are volunteers that can transport and can get people showers as needed.

Mr. Pickens said that's all I had. Thank you.

Mr. Roberts said is this a new additional service that the City is offering but it was in a different...it wasn't in a different location before? It's...

Ms. Cameron said it was in a different location. Last year, Wesley United Methodist Church on Galena and May had the contract last year. So, it was out of that location and in previous years, the City operated it out of the train station. And it was staffed by City staff and then just security overnight. They were sleeping on the floor, lights were on 24/7, there was no place to charge their phone, they were sometimes given a meal, not always. So, we think this has a little more dignity and allows people to get the rest they need so they can conquer kind of their struggles during the day.

Mr. Roberts said but it sounds like it...it's a service that we've been offering as a community for years...

Ms. Cameron said yes.

Mr. Roberts said it's just we've got a new location, and we think it's a better location?

Ms. Cameron said yeah, yeah. We were looking...you know, Wesley rented out, you know, as many churches in our community and around the country since Covid have struggled in many ways...they are renting out some of their space this year in order to kind of pay for that big old beautiful building they have, and for the repairs needed. So, they weren't able to host this year, so we put it out to bid, and Becoming Church was the only one that submitted a bid for it. But we're glad someone did because it's not an easy job, but they're, you know, doing a good job managing the center this year. Yeah, Wesley is part of the administration of it this year as well. So, they've been heavily involved.

Mr. Roberts said not specifically related to this but what's the...has the size of the unhoused needs increased in the last several years in the community or...?

Ms. Cameron said yes, significantly. I don't have the numbers directly in front of me but every year there's a time...there's a time count. I think it's at the end of the 31st of January, they go around and count. We've seen a...I think it's something like a 500% increase in unhoused individuals all across the nation but also specifically in the Aurora area. Unfortunately, the nature of the economy and housing and basic needs costing more and more is pushing people that might've been teetering on it just on the other edge. So, Hesed is doing expansions all the time but although they're the 2nd largest shelter in the State, they cannot keep up with the demand. And I'm a believer that it shouldn't just all be on one organization. It takes a community to take care of a community.

Chairman Pilmer said anything else? Thank you.

Ms. Cameron said thank you so much.

Chairman Pilmer said this is a Public Hearing. If anyone in the audience would like to address the Commission regarding this item, they will have the opportunity to do so. And I will state for the record that no one has come forward so we will close the public hearing, and I will turn it back over to Staff. I know you do have Findings of Fact.

Mrs. Vacek said we sure do. Staff has the following comments regarding the Findings of Fact:

1. The proposed emergency warming shelter will not be detrimental to or endanger the public health, safety, morals, comfort, or general welfare as the development will improve the general welfare. In fact, it will enhance the general welfare by providing a safe, supervised, and climate-controlled space for vulnerable individuals during extreme weather conditions. In addition, this zoning adjustment reflects the City's commitment to a life-saving, humane, and carefully regulated response to winter weather emergencies.
2. The emergency warming center will not be injurious to nearby properties or impair the use, enjoyment, or value of surrounding land uses. The City is not making any exterior changes to the existing building, therefore, there should be no impact regarding lighting and noise as all activities will occur indoors. In addition, proper supervision and onsite management will ensure that the center integrates respectfully into its surroundings.
3. The emergency warming center will not impede the normal or orderly development of surrounding properties. It is a seasonal, and low-impact use that supports public safety without altering long-term development patterns in the area. The facility will operate within an existing structure, require minimal site modification, and will not introduce conditions that would hinder future improvements or permitted uses on adjacent properties.
4. Adequate utilities, road, drainage have been accounted for as this is an existing building.
5. Yes. Adequate measures are in place to ensure safe ingress and egress to the site. The emergency warming center will operate within an existing facility with established access points from River Street that are designed to accommodate vehicle and pedestrian traffic. The use is expected to generate minimal traffic. No modifications to public streets are required, and the anticipated traffic levels will not create congestion or negatively impact surrounding roadways.
6. The Conditional Use in all other respects conforms to the applicable regulations of the various zoning districts.

With that, I'll give you my recommendation:

Staff recommends Conditional Approval of the Ordinance Granting a Conditional Use Permit for a Social Service Agencies, Charitable Organizations, Health Related Facilities, and similar uses when not operated for pecuniary profit (6630) Use to allow an emergency warming shelter on the Property located at 712 S. River Street with the following conditions:

1. That hours of operation for guests shall be from November 1st to May 1st, 7:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. daily, when temperatures are at or below 32 degrees. Any minor change to the hours of operation must approved by the Zoning Administrator on written application. The Zoning Administrator may, in their sole discretion, grant, deny, or partially grant the application for a minor change to the hours of operation. Any appeal of the Zoning Administrator's decision or a major change to the hours of operation must be heard by the Planning and Zoning Commission after notice pursuant to the City's Zoning Ordinance, and a final decision made by the City Council.
2. That the emergency warming shelter shall have a maximum of 64 individuals, including guests, staff, and volunteers.
3. That if the emergency warming shelter ceases to be used for 12 continuous months, the conditional use shall automatically expire with no further legislative action by the City.

Chairman Pilmer said thank you. You've heard Staff's recommendation with 3 conditions. Is there a motion?

MOTION OF APPROVAL WAS MADE BY: Mrs. Martinez

MOTION SECONDED BY: Mr. Roberts

AYES: Chairman Pilmer, Mr. Gonzales, Mr. Kuehl, Mr. Lee, Mrs. Martinez, Mr. Pickens, and Mr. Roberts

NAYS: 0

ABSTAIN: 0

Motion carried.

Chairman Pilmer said motion carries. Staff did read into the record 6 Findings of Fact. Are there any corrections or changes? Chairman Pilmer said motion carries. Staff did read into the record 6 Findings of Fact. Are there any corrections or changes? Hearing none, can I have a motion to accept those Findings of Fact as read into the record?

MOTION OF APPROVAL OF FINDINGS OF FACT WAS MADE BY: Mr. Lee

MOTION SECONDED BY: Mrs. Martinez

AYES: Chairman Pilmer, Mr. Gonzales, Mr. Kuehl, Mr. Lee, Mrs. Martinez, Mr. Pickens, and Mr. Roberts

NAYS: 0

ABSTAIN: 0

Motion carried.

Chairman Pilmer said motion carries. And then if Staff will state where this will next be heard.

Mrs. Vacek said sorry, I forgot that I have to do this. This will be next heard at the Building, Zoning, and Economic Development Committee on January 14th here at City Hall in the City Council Chambers at 4 pm.

Chairman Pilmer said thank you.

Aye: 7 Chairperson Pilmer, At Large Lee, At Large Gonzales, At Large Pickens, At Large Roberts, At Large Martinez and At Large Kuehl

Text of Legislative File 25-0984