

# **SOMERVILLE WARMING CENTER**

Community Survey Results and Perspectives

Connexion - May 28 2024



# WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?

- The City of Somerville operated a night-time Warming Center from January – March 2024
- It was located on the second floor of the Armory Building on Highland Avenue, staffed by Housing Families Inc.
- Under the sponsorship of City Councilor Matt McLaughlin and the Committee on Public Health and Safety, the Somerville Nonprofit Boards Collaborative conducted a survey in April-May 2024 to learn about community member's experiences. A total of 31 responses were received



# SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What was your relationship with the Warming Center?
  - Options: used it, staffed it, volunteered, tenant or neighbor of the Armory, collaborated/referred individuals, other
2. Was the Warming Center helpful to you?
3. How did you originally learn about the Warming Center?



## **SURVEY QUESTIONS, CONT.**

4. What were your positive experiences with the Warming Center?
5. What were your negative experiences with the Warming Center?
6. If you had questions or concerns, were you clear about who to ask?
7. Did you feel that your questions or concerns were adequately addressed?



# SURVEY QUESTIONS, CONT.

8. What are your suggestions for a future Somerville Warming Center / Cooling Center?
9. Option to include name and contact info
10. Option to participate in an interview or focus group



# WHO RESPONDED?

Tenant or neighbor of the Armory	10	32%
Collaborated with/referred individuals to the Warming Center, advocated for creation of Warming Center	7	22%
Used the Warming Center (including an individual who tried but was transported to another shelter site)	7	22%
Staffed/volunteered at the Armory	5	16%
Other: Arts at the Armory Board member; hoped to volunteer but was never asked	2	6%



# **“WAS THE WARMING CENTER HELPFUL TO YOU?”**

Of 7 Warming Center participants:

5 – Yes

1 – was referred elsewhere, not sure why

1 - “It was all right, not great”

Of all survey respondents:

Yes – 11

No – 9

“I’m glad it was an option to help people during the worst weather” – 2



# POSITIVE EXPERIENCES?

Reported by Warming Center participants:

- Warm and safe place with hot coffee
- Used daily – warm space, provided bed, food, juice and coffee
- Getting food and a warm place
- I had no problems
- Two noted that the cots were nice



# POSITIVE EXPERIENCES?

Reported by other respondents:

- Getting to know staff and patrons, warm and friendly, helping others
- It's a good thing to provide a warm space for people to be in during bad weather, with beds, food and phone chargers
- Good to have a place to refer people late in the day
- Hope this can lead to a permanent solution for both a Warming and Cooling center



# NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES?

Input from Warming Center participants:

- Three did not report negative experiences; one was not admitted

Specific feedback:

- Needs to be open more: longer hours and more months
- It was loud. People were yelling and concerts in the building kept me awake. It was very strict, with a lot of rules and I got in trouble for complaining
- It was a 45-minute walk from East Somerville, too far
- People were drinking, there were no hot meals, kicked out very early in AM



# NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES?

Frequently identified issues from all respondents:

- City did not prepare adequately; the launch was chaotic and rushed. Attention to the needs of other Armory tenants and spaces within and around the building was insufficient
- Not enough blankets or room. Only one bathroom. Access was not ADA compliant. People's belongings were in an open area
- Intake process took too long, with people left waiting in the cold and rain, causing fights. Concerns about early arrivals and late departures should have been anticipated
- Trash, bedbugs, human lice, drugs and alcohol, human waste in the building and on grounds made for unsanitary and unsafe conditions
- City was unresponsive to timely concerns and communicated poorly with those affected
- Transportation was not available, stressing program participants and collaborators



# SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE PLANNING

Suggestions from Warming Center participants:

- Daytime hours. Staff on hand to help with health, housing, clothing and other needs.
- East Somerville location
- Faster process to get in -- it was cold outdoors and people were fighting. It's tough to share space with people who are drunk when you are trying to sleep. It was a 45-minute walk so a location closer to East Somerville would be better
- A quiet place with more room. More food. Provide people with something to do -- they just wanted you to go to bed.



# SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE PLANNING

## Suggestions from other respondents:

- Many suggested longer hours. Some indicated the need for 12 months of operation; some thought December-April. Four noted the need for 24-hour operations. Others asked for earlier arrival times and later departures.
- Nearly half strongly urged that a different site be used, noting that the Armory is active during the days and evenings with arts activities and patrons.
- Advanced planning and preparation is needed. The fast roll-out was difficult for many.
- Communication throughout the period of operation needs to be clearer and City staff must be more responsive.
- Establishing a permanent site in East Somerville was repeatedly suggested.



# THEMES AND AREAS FOR INQUIRY

- Find a different location. Prioritize East Somerville.
- Be open more hours or permanently. Add supportive services.
- Work openly with tenants and collaborators to plan and implement a program that works well in its community location.
- City to designate and publish contact information for an employee or team responsible for responding quickly to health and safety concerns.



# PLEASE SEND ADDITIONAL IDEAS TO:

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