



Eileen M. Donoghue  
*City Manager*

Kara Keefe Mullin  
*Assistant City Manager*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Contact:** Phil Geoffroy  
Executive Assistant-Communications  
978-674-4400 | [pgeoffroy@lowellma.gov](mailto:pgeoffroy@lowellma.gov)

## City of Lowell Opens Emergency Shelter for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness

The City of Lowell has opened an emergency shelter in the gymnasium of the Stoklosa Middle School, located at 560 Broadway Street. The shelter will accommodate asymptomatic individuals experiencing homelessness that have been exposed to individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19. No individuals who have tested positive will be directed to the Stoklosa site. The emergency shelter is intended to support the mitigation of the risk of a COVID-19 outbreak within the population served by the existing shelter. Its opening comes following extensive planning undertaken by the City in partnership with Southern Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC) and the Lowell Community Health Center to address the distinct vulnerability that the coronavirus crisis poses to individuals experiencing homelessness.

The emergency shelter will have the capacity to support up to 40 individuals. It will be staffed by reassigned Lowell Community Health Center staff and managed by SMOC, which operates the Lowell Transitional Living Center on Middlesex Street. The operation of the shelter will be funded by the City of Lowell through grant-based funding sources dedicated for homelessness initiatives. The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) provided cots, personal protective equipment, and other equipment needed to outfit the shelter. The City's Department of Public Works and Department of Planning and Development worked to prepare the Stoklosa gymnasium to open over the weekend.

"Since the onset of the coronavirus crisis, the City has made responding to the distinct risks that the virus poses to individuals experiencing homelessness a priority," said **City Manager Eileen Donoghue**. "The City has worked around the clock to develop a plan address to address the challenges associate with homelessness, and we are grateful for the tireless support offered by the Lowell School Department, SMOC and the Community Health Center in this effort. Paired with coordinated efforts at the state level, we are hopeful that this emergency shelter will substantially mitigate the risk of an outbreak among the City's homeless population."

The state recently launched a program to provide isolation space in hotels and motels to individuals that test positive for COVID-19 but are below hospital intake level and are unable to isolate in their current living situation. These regional sites are staffed by medical professionals and offer statewide transportation coverage when referrals are made. The closest isolation site to Lowell that has been activated is located at Aloft Hotels in Lexington. The state intends to bring additional sites on line as needed.