



CITY OF MANCHESTER *Emergency Operations Center*

April 30, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic is turning our world upside down, and for those experiencing homelessness, the coronavirus outbreak represents a significant health risk.

Cities across the country are grappling with this difficult issue, and Manchester is no exception. Our city is home to the largest emergency homeless shelter in the state, Families in transition/New Horizons, which was already facing issues of overcrowding before this pandemic began. As a result, the Manchester Emergency Operations Center (EOC) has been working tirelessly with FIT/New Horizons to address concerns facing our homeless population at the shelter.

To comply with the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) social distancing recommendations at the shelter, the Manchester EOC is helping FIT/New Horizons on opening two additional temporary locations for individuals experiencing homelessness – the former St. Casimir School and Angie's Place. We'd like to thank the State EOC and the NH National Guard for their work to help clean, sanitize, and set up both sites.

In addition, the State opened a temporary facility in Laconia for people experiencing homelessness who have tested positive for COVID-19. This facility is available to support individuals from across the state, including Manchester. And when possible, both the City and the State EOCs have secured hotel rooms for homeless individuals. However, room availability is a significant challenge, so the options are limited and most times don't exist.

Despite these efforts, we're seeing an increase in homeless encampments in the city. Many homeless individuals refuse to go to the shelter for fear of COVID-19, and FIT/New Horizons has temporarily halted accepting new individuals, following guidance from the Health Department on best practices for infectious disease control.

It's important to note that the CDC guidelines state that "*unless individual housing units are available, do not clear encampments during community spread of COVID-19. Clearing encampments can cause people to disperse throughout the community and break connections with service providers. This increases the potential for infectious disease spread.*"

During this time of crisis, the City is complying with CDC guidelines to decrease, and will not break up homeless camps as it could increase the possibility of COVID-19 community-wide spread. This is a difficult situation for everyone, but our goal has been, and always will be, to ensure the health and safety of our community.

As a result, the State has stepped forward and has agreed to provide and pay for essential services to these encampments, including restroom facilities, hand washing stations, food, and trash removal. In addition, the Manchester Police Department was awarded a Justice Assistance Grant, funding 24/7 police presence at the encampments, and increased patrols in the surrounding neighborhoods. Finally, the Manchester Fire Department and outreach workers have established a COVID Response Unit, providing infection control and safety measures. All of these services will be provided at no cost to the City of Manchester.

It's important to note these new encampments, and the services being provided to these locations, are temporary. Knowing there's a shortage of emergency shelter beds, transitional and affordable housing throughout the state, we're pleased the Governor yesterday announced \$3 million going directly to shelters and community agencies to support permanent housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

We're working diligently to strengthen partnerships and help provide services to our homeless population. But, Manchester does not have the resources to shoulder the burden of New Hampshire's homeless issues alone. It's important for other communities to invest in services and establish partnerships to assist individuals experiencing homelessness, instead of sending people to our city. As a community, and as a state, we have a shared responsibility to help our most vulnerable residents.

We know this is a frustrating situation, but we're taking every action to keep all Manchester residents, both those experiencing homelessness and those who are not, safe and healthy.

Unfortunately, homelessness will still be an issue after this pandemic passes. However, the City will continue to work toward responding to this challenge. Our commitment has been, and will continue to be, the security and well-being of our community.

###

Mayor Joyce Craig
Director Anna Thomas, Manchester Health Department
Chief Dan Goonan, Manchester Fire Department
Chief Carlo Capano, Manchester Police Department