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News Release

For Immediate Release

Zoning Changes Facilitate Churches as Overnight Shelters

Two Springfield churches are now serving as overnight cold-weather shelters for homeless men and women. These churches are filling a need identified by the community during 2009 and 2010, by a variety of citizen and non-profit groups.

At that time, churches were identified as possible shelters for Springfield's growing homeless population during extremely cold overnight weather. City zoning regulations were identified as one of the issues preventing local churches from taking people in for overnight stays.

In December 2009 and May 2010, City Council passed resolutions declaring, and then extending, an economic and housing access calamity in Springfield. This eased some zoning rules for churches, allowing those that are able to meet required building, safety and health codes to establish facilities providing food and lodging to the unemployed and working poor without a permanent home.

This week, Council of Churches of the Ozarks Executive Director Mark Struckhoff updated City Council on the progress of the churches that are now filling this need. The two churches currently operating as overnight cold-weather shelters are East Sunshine Church of Christ (adult men) and Pathways United Methodist Church (adult women).

East Sunshine Church of Christ began shelter operations in late December and is averaging about 30 men per night. Pathways United Methodist began its operations Jan. 16. Struckhoff said a third church, First Baptist Church, is in the process of setting up as an emergency overnight shelter for young males ages 17-21. First Baptist will work with Rare Breed Youth Services to coordinate this effort.

"We want to take the opportunity to give credit to the churches and volunteers who have stepped up to fill a desperate need in the community," said City Manager Greg Burris. "After the City's zoning rules were identified as one of the roadblocks to allowing churches to serve in this capacity if they so desired, City staff and City Council began working to turn that around. We want to help facilitate this kind of work any way we can, so long as life safety is not compromised."

The economic calamity resolution passed by City Council remains in effect until May 2011.

For more information about changes to the City's zoning regulations, contact: Ralph Rognstad, Director of Planning, (417) 864-1031.
For more information (including contact information) on the churches serving as emergency shelters, contact: Romona Baker, Resource Coordinator for Homeless Services at the Council of Churches of the Ozarks, (417) 862-3586.

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