

Quincy YMCA to serve as secondary homeless shelter

By
[Mary Whitfill](#)

The Patriot Ledger

Posted Mar 31, 2020 at 4:18 PM

Updated Mar 31, 2020 at 4:48 PM

The gymnasium at the YMCA downtown will provide beds, meals and supportive services to about 50 Father Bill's guests.

QUINCY — The YMCA will open its doors Wednesday as a temporary overnight shelter to help clients of Father Bill's and Mainspring — city's only homeless shelter — better meet social distancing guidelines.

Officials with the South Shore YMCA branch in Quincy Center and the shelter spent much of Tuesday setting up 50 cots in its gymnasium where beds, meals and supportive services will be provided to older adults and people with underlying health conditions.

Father Bill's Place has been providing shelter to more than 120 people per night in recent weeks, and the set up makes it impossible to follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines about personal space and distance between beds, the shelter's CEO John Yazwinski said earlier this month.

“We knew right away that the ability to keep people 6 feet apart, per CDC guidelines, was going to be extremely tough,” he said. “We are an overflow shelter . . . We have people sleeping on the floor and it's really hard to meet those recommendations because we also don't want to not have a place for people to go.”

Want news like this sent straight to your inbox? Head over to

[PatriotLedger.com](https://www.patriotledger.com)

to sign up for alerts and make sure you never miss a thing. You pick the news you want, we deliver.

Officials for Father Bill's say the YMCA location will provide necessary relief to the shelter, and open up the possibility of creating potential quarantine locations. The shelter has not had to quarantine any guests, but if necessary there would be room to do so at the Y or at Father Bill's once the overflow guests have moved.

Quincy Mayor Thomas Koch said the city started working with the shelter on ideas over a week ago, and that South Shore YMCA President Paul Gorman jumped at the chance to help. Joe Finn, former Quincy city councilor and president of the Massachusetts Housing & Shelter Alliance, also pitched in, he said.

"I'm very grateful the Y for their help," Koch said. "It just make sense not to wait for a major problem and try to stay ahead of this. Making more room for the beds is huge. Father Bill's is a crammed place and we're just asking for trouble with that, so I think this is one of those necessary things."

Quincy's Office of Emergency Management provided the cots and logistical support needed to operate the emergency shelter. The city has committed \$50,000 to the initiative so far, Koch's Chief of Staff Chris Walker said, and Father Bill's will also be privately fundraising to make up its own share of the costs.

Both Koch and Father Bill's officials say they hope some of the costs are eligible for federal reimbursements down the line.

"This is a very challenging crisis and we just have to stay ahead of it," Koch said. "I was criticized after the storms in 2015 for how much money I spent, but in the middle of it when we were moving snow and clearing roads —nobody complains then. I just feel like we have to make the decisions on the ground for the health and safety of our residents, and we'll deal with the money later."

Father Bill's has been working with the Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program, which operates a health care clinic inside Father Bill's Place, and Manet Community Health Center to implement health and safety measures that better protect guests and staff during the coronavirus pandemic.

Guests have been screened by medical personnel and staff at the door of the shelter for the last several weeks, and those who are displaying symptoms are not allowed to enter. They are instead directed to Barbara McInnis House in Boston, which helps homeless people who are too sick for life in shelters but not sick enough for an acute care hospital bed.

All guests staying at the South Shore YMCA will have undergone the screening process at Father Bill's Place and displayed no COVID-19 symptoms.

Reach Mary Whitfill at mwhitfill@patriotledger.com.