

Homeless shelter stuck in permit process

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Authors: hjones@thelancasternews.com

Byline: By Haley Jones
hjones@thelancasternews.com

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While no visible progress has been made on the United Way's homeless shelter on the corner of West Meeting Street, Executive Director Holly Furr said there has been substantial activity behind the scenes.

The project has been extended many months, with the projected opening date being pushed back several times.

Furr said she and her team are aiming for completion and occupancy, "hopefully by the end of 2023," but cannot say for sure until renovations begin.

In January, Furr told The Lancaster News that the general contractor was waiting for permits to be able to renovate the sprinkler system and build an ADA-compliant bathroom. That is still the case.

General contractor Mace Green with Mace Green Builders in Lancaster said the delays are not atypical for a construction process, as building owners usually have the permits in place before a general contractor will get involved.

"I took it upon myself to approach it (the project) as a design-build project, where I'm taking on that task myself," Green said. "It's basically starting from scratch, waiting on blueprints."

Green said he was a part of a meeting Wednesday, May 31, with the engineer and architect so they could iron out details, and anticipate finishing the blueprints next week.

"Once it's completed, I submit it to the zoning office for them to sign off on it, and then we can get it permitted and get it started," Green said.

In addition to the ADA-compliant bathroom and sprinkler system, Green is also updating the fire rating and plumbing in the building. He said the entire building has to be brought up to code for occupancy.

“If I had permits in hand, we would probably be completed in maybe four months,” Green said.

The project cost estimate is not known yet.

Furr said United Way of Lancaster County received \$334,213 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds from the county for the project. She said that visual progress will be coming soon.

“I want to thank everybody for their support and dedication in this process,” Furr said. “We know that it’s a much-needed need in our community, and we hope that the community will continue to support us and this process.”

Concerned Lancaster resident Tindall Yarborough spoke at several City Council meetings about the need for accommodations for those facing homelessness, and said she is frustrated by the lack of progress on projects like the Meeting Street shelter.

“Whatever the issue is, it’s the same rhetoric over and over and over again, and this is not the first time this has happened with the homeless shelter coming to Lancaster,” Yarborough said during citizen’s comments at the April 11 council meeting.

Brandy Laughridge also spoke at that meeting, and criticized the lack of help in the city of Lancaster for homeless individuals. She is currently homeless.

“If you’re homeless, your options are to literally sleep under a bridge somewhere and hope you don’t get caught, or find someone who will take you in,” Laughridge said.

Furr said United Way wants and needs to make sure the shelter is safe for residents and that all renovations meet city code before it can open.

Furr also said that once the shelter is built, it is not a “check the box and then we’re done,” because homelessness is a continuing issue the Lancaster community is facing.

United Way is working with LACH (Lancaster Area Coalition for the Homeless) on developing programs for job assistance, substance abuse and other life skills for homeless residents in Lancaster.

“It’s been a little frustrating that we haven’t been able to move as quickly as we had hoped, but there is some definite progress,” Furr said.

Child images

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LANNWS-06-07-23 MEETING STREET SHELTER FURR MUG



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