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The Laconia Daily Sun

THURSDAY

THURSDAY, JANUARY 6, 2022

VOL. 22 NO. 150

LACONIA, N.H.

527-9299

FREE



Isaiah 61 volunteer Dave Lang shows the sleeping area for the new overnight shelter. The space will be Laconia's only "wet" shelter, meaning non-sober persons are welcome to stay. "We've had so many friends become sober, get jobs, getting apartments. I don't think the public sees that," Lang said. (Jon Decker/Laconia Daily Sun photo)

Gilford cracking down on problem vacation renters

By ROBERTA BAKER
THE LACONIA DAILY SUN

GILFORD — Loud talking and raucous laughter until 2 a.m. Fifteen to 20 cars parked in front of one home. Beer cans and liquor bottles tossed in neighbors' yards. Garbage piled outside, scattered by animals overnight. A spike in community water usage of almost 40%.

Any one of these might be considered a problem or crisis. When added together, they become a roud-the-clock nightmare-in-residence.

"It's unbearable. I call the police every weekend," said Dave Andrews, who bought his year-round home in Gunstock Acres in 2017. In this community of 650 to 700 property owners, and elsewhere in the Lakes Region, short term vacation rentals have exploded since COVID, collapsing peace and private enjoyment for a number of year-rounders.

"They have a hot tub over there, and they're out all night screaming and yelling. We have alcohol containers in our yard all summer long. We can't sit outside and have a conversation because of noise. I have to keep all the windows shut and the TV on to get some sleep," said Andrews.

"It's tantamount to a motel spread over a bunch of houses," said Gilford's planning board chair, Wayne Hall. "Some are turning into party properties."

For affected homeowners, help may be on the way — in the form of municipal regulations with teeth.

Winter shelter gets green light

By MICHAEL MORTENSEN
THE LACONIA DAILY SUN

LACONIA — People who are struggling with both homelessness and addiction should soon be able to find warmth at night, now that the Planning Board has approved a cold-weather shelter.

The board, by a vote of

6-2, approved a proposal to operate a cold-weather shelter from December through March in a portion of the Isaiah 61 building at 100 New Salem St. The vote came after lengthy discussion among board members and 45 minutes of comment from many in the capacity crowd which showed up for

the meeting held in the City Council chambers.

Unlike the two existing homeless shelters in the city, sobriety will not be required for staying at the Isaiah 61 shelter.

Dawn Longval, who operates Isaiah 61, along with her husband, Dave, said the shelter has been rated by the Fire Department to accom-

modate up to 31 people, who would be monitored by two on-duty supervisors. Check-in for the shelter would be from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. nightly, with lights out at 10. Occupants would need to leave by 8:30 the following morning. Those coming

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Wolfeboro drowning victim identified

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into the shelter would be able to keep only their cell-phones with them. The rest of their personal belongings would be stored in a secure area and returned to them only when they leave the premises.

Board members raised concerns about overnight supervision, steps to address concerns from neighbors, the extent of COVID precautions that will be followed for the duration of the pandemic, and verification that the way the shelter will be operated conforms totally to state law.

City Councilor Bruce Cheney, who sits on the board, and one of the two members to vote against approving the shelter plan, did so partly because he wanted an absolute assurance up front that such a shelter was legal.

Fire Chief Kirk Beattie, who also serves on the board, said the Isaiah 61 facility was permissible under a state law which is designed to facilitate the operation of cold-weather shelters which are open no more than 120 days in a given year, and have a minimum of two on-duty supervisors.

"My concern is the statutory construction that allows this," Cheney said following the vote.

"I wanted an answer before we made a decision." In addition, he said objections raised by constituents who had contacted him was also a factor in his vote.

The other "no" vote was cast by board member Michael DellaVecchia.

To a question about supervision, Dawn Longval told the board that should there be a night when two supervisors were not available the shelter would not open. She

said she anticipated that most of the supervisors would be volunteers, and that all supervisors would undergo training before being assigned to a shift.

The board made its approval conditional on Longval providing the city with a description of the training for supervisors along the list of shelter rules.

The Longvals opened Isaiah 61 on New Salem Street in 2018 as a drop-in center and soup kitchen which since then has catered largely to the city's homeless community where they can have coffee, a warm meal, a hot shower, or stow their belongings.

"It's a place of hope in a dark world," Dawn Longval said at the start of her presentation to the board.

But next-door neighbor Donna Clairmont told the board that for her Isaiah 61 has been a disruption and annoyance and she fears that the opening of the shelter will only make matters worse. She faulted the Longvals for not doing enough to control the behavior of those coming to Isaiah 61.

"This is about them doing their job. They seem to want to overlook these things," Clairmont said of the unseemly and unruly behavior she said she has been exposed to by visitors to Isaiah 61. To address Clairmont's apprehension, the board made its approval on the condition that the Longvals construct a solid fence to protect Clairmont's privacy.

Most of the comments offered during the public hearing were in support of the shelter — many of them from people who volunteer at Isaiah 61.

Sharon Biladeau, who drives up from Plaistow to help out in various ways, said spending time with the people at Isaiah 61 has meant as much to her as it does for them.

"Sometimes I'm the one who benefits from the fellowship," she said.

But local resident Alan Dawson objected to the city allowing a shelter where alcoholics and drug addicts can stay.

"If you are going to approve this, make it a sobriety house," he said. "Make them earn a place to stay."

Board member DellaVecchia said the shelter would undermine the economic revival that is taking place downtown.

"Attracting more homeless people will only denigrate the city," he said.

Moreover, he said not requiring sobriety as a condition for shelter is a disservice to the addicts themselves.

"If you let them stay that way, they are not going to get any better," he said, emphasizing addicts need to take responsibility for themselves. "Get a job, and get yourself a house to live in."

Board member Charlie St. Clair noted that it appeared that most opponents of the plan had not shown up at the hearing to express their views.

"I've been hearing criticism," he said, "but they're not here."

St. Clair went on to say that homeless is a chronic and widespread problem.

"This is not just a Laconia problem," he said. "I'm going to vote for this, but there's a lot of work that needs to be done."

The Longvals still need to go through the city's building permit process and complete the upgrade to the building's fire alarm system before the shelter can open.

'It's a place of hope in a dark world'

'Make it a sobriety house... Make them earn a place to stay'

TRULY
HARD SELTZER

WEIRS BEACH INVITATIONAL
8-BALL TOURNAMENT

THE BIG HOUSE
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Miller Lite

POOL

60/30/10 SPLIT ON PURSE

TWISTED TEA

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TOURNAMENT

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