

Neighborhood Notification

**First Presbyterian Church to Host
WHEEL Women's Shelter
At 715 Spring Street
Starting Friday, February 12, 2021**

On Friday, February 12th, 2021 First Presbyterian Church will open its doors for a City-funded shelter for up to 60 homeless women that will be operated by WHEEL (Women's Housing Equality and Enhancement League). The shelter, at 715 Spring Street, will occupy space that previously housed a co-ed Navigation Shelter, which relocated late last year.

WHEEL is an organization of homeless and formerly homeless women founded in 1993. WHEEL sponsors many projects for the safety, shelter, dignity, empowerment and remembrance of homeless people. These include a 20-year-old, well-regarded low-barrier women's shelter that's been hosted for the past five years at Trinity Episcopal Parish (711 Cherry Street). In earlier years WHEEL shelters have been hosted by Plymouth Congregational Church, St. James Cathedral, Sacred Heart Parish, and many other host sites.

The WHEEL shelter at First Presbyterian will be in addition to and very similar to the one we currently operate at Trinity Episcopal Parish.

Shelters for homeless individuals are allowed on the property of religious institutions under the United States Constitution as articulated in the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000. Washington State Law (RCW 36.01.290) mirrors the Federal Law's recognition of religious institutions' authority to shelter poor and homeless people.

The WHEEL Shelter and its participants at First Presbyterian will continue our longstanding track record of operating as a good neighbor and trustworthy tenant, keeping our commitments and enforcing our rules. We are grateful to the City of Seattle and First Presbyterian Church for this opportunity to provide critically-needed shelter for women, especially during the severe weather Seattle is experiencing today.

What is a WHEEL shelter?

The WHEEL Shelter at First Presbyterian will be a community of up to 60 adult homeless women (no children). At startup we will operate night-time only (8 PM to 8 AM). Within three months we will expand to 24-hour operations.

The shelter is staffed at all times (at least three staff during the day, two overnight). Showers, laundry, meals, case management, activities and other amenities are offered.

You are welcome to review our rules and our stringent COVID safety protocols. Those not respecting them are removed from the community. Shelter participants are provided with METRO bus tickets to leave the shelter for essential reasons. Loitering is not allowed in the neighborhood.

The Need for Shelter

The last Point in Time Count for King County found nearly 6,000 people sleeping unsheltered. You can imagine how dangerous and scary it is to sleep outside alone. Many of us have been assaulted, robbed or abused in some way. We have had friends who have died outside. It is hard to hold a job or stay healthy. Women are particularly vulnerable and at risk on the streets.

Another of WHEEL's efforts is sponsoring Women in Black silent witnessing vigils whenever a homeless person dies outside, in public, or by violence in King County. In 2020 at least 153 homeless people died this way, at the average age of death of just 48. This broke our hearts and all previous records.

There are not enough affordable units of housing in King County for even a small percentage of us. There is not enough basic shelter for thousands of people. These are some of the reasons the WHEEL women's shelter at First Presbyterian Church is so desperately needed.

Our Promise to You

WHEEL is an organization and community with very little money. Almost all we have is our word. Given these circumstances there are few things more important to us than keeping our promises – not only to our friends, but to everyone.

While we are here:

- **You will see the property we are on, and the neighborhood we are in treated respectfully.
- **You will not see us panhandling, loitering, or being boisterous in the area.
- **Drug dealing, using and other illegal activity will not be tolerated in or around the shelter.
- **We will leave the church property in at least as good a condition as it was when we arrived.
- **We will conduct regular Litter Patrols around the shelter.

Our greatest strength is our reputation for being responsible in our operations.

If you have questions, suggestions or concerns, please call the WHEEL Office at (206) 956-0334. First Presbyterian Church can be reached at (206) 624-0644. City of Seattle partners can be reached at (206) 684-0231.

For more information about WHEEL online, check out www.wheelforwomen.org, or wheelforwomen on Facebook.

Thank you!