



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

To: Louis A. DePasquale, City Manager
Assaad J. Sayah MD, Commissioner of Public Health

From: Branville G. Bard, Jr., Police Commissioner,
Claude A. Jacob, Chief Public Health Officer

Date: March 30, 2020

Subject: **EMERGENCY TASK FORCE SITE RECOMMENDATION FOR TEMPORARY
EMERGENCY HOMELESS SHELTER DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a pandemic that continues to spread rapidly through cities and towns across the globe. Public health experts have declared that this is an impending crisis and that there is a critical need to protect the most vulnerable here in Cambridge -- residents who are homeless or unable to safely isolate or quarantine in their residence -- from the spread of COVID-19. According to public health officials and experts, failure to take immediate action would result in an extensive spread of COVID-19 throughout the City's homeless community, thereby essentially guaranteeing a rampant spread throughout the City's first responder community, hospital and healthcare professionals, and community-at-large. Based on this assessment, on March 23, 2020, you appointed an Emergency Task Force ("ETF") and tasked the group with identifying a temporary location to shelter our most vulnerable residents during the Public Health Emergency brought on by the spread of COVID-19.

The ETF, which consisted of nine members and eight support members, held its first virtual meeting on March 23, 2020. Following this meeting, the ETF quickly identified 17 possible locations across the City for the temporary emergency shelter ("Temporary Emergency Shelter"). When selecting these locations, ETF members considered many options, including City-owned properties, both shuttered and currently in use, privately-owned facilities and City hotels left vacant as a result of this global crisis. As time was of the essence, the list of locations was pared down to five possible locations by an ETF subgroup. Site visits were conducted at all five locations before settling on the best option.

The War Memorial Recreation Center, Field House, and garage ("War Memorial"), which is a part of and adjacent to the Cambridge Rindge and Latin School ("CRLS") campus, has been temporarily vacated due to the declared COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. This facility already serves as the designated site for emergency preparedness activities and has been used on previous occasions to conduct mass flu clinics, emergency drills and most recently served as a shelter for those displaced as a result of the 10-alarm Berkshire Street fire in 2016. The ETF has

determined that the War Memorial site is the best location for the Temporary Emergency Shelter. The War Memorial is the only existing site that meets both the physical space and activation time requirements needed for the Temporary Emergency Shelter.

The War Memorial offers one centralized location with three distinct service areas. Exclusive space will be dedicated to individuals that need to be isolated due to confirmed tests or symptoms consistent with COVID-19. Separate physical space will be made available for individuals that need to be quarantined due to possible exposure to someone who is a confirmed case; unique to this site is the ability to provide quarantine space without entering the building, as individuals will be housed in a temporary setting that will be constructed and located in an underground parking area that allows easy access to care and transport. The War Memorial site will allow for a coordinated and phased approach to fully opening all aspects of the Temporary Emergency Shelter. The City has been collaborating and consulting with the School Administration on the logistical aspects of this initiative.

Additionally, the overall complex has ample physical space to accommodate residents without symptoms or for those who may not have access to daytime services or an overnight shelter and are seeking to mitigate exposure. The City has secured a commitment from Bay Cove Human Services, as well as the Cambridge/Somerville Healthcare for the Homeless program, to provide staffing and logistical support at this location, once approved. Operationally, the activation of the shelter will occur in phases in order to ensure the safety and quality of the care and services being provided during this crisis. Finally, the War Memorial is a City facility that has been previously certified as an emergency shelter location by the American Red Cross and is designated by the Cambridge Department of Public Health as part of its emergency preparedness plan.

Before making its recommendation, the ETF considered other factors such as:

(1) The ability to return the site to normal post-use. The War Memorial requires only minimal construction of temporary clinical structures in the facility's sub-level/garage area that are easily removable. Also, deep cleaning of the entire facility can be conducted quickly to comply with environmental cleaning and disinfecting standards as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as well as the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. These factors will allow the facility to be readily and safely available when school and recreational programming are able to be reinstated.

(2) The ability to provide security for the facility and surrounding community. The War Memorial's existing security design is easily augmentable utilizing a combination of private security for the interior and a dedicated team of Cambridge Police Officers to provide security for the surrounding community on a 24-hour basis. The proposed configuration and security plan will minimize any potential impact or disruption to the immediate neighborhood.

(3) Time to readiness. The relatively quick timeframe to operationalize and activate the site from "approval to opening" was much shorter than any of the other proposed locations—all of which would require extensive construction and the acquisition of substantial supporting infrastructure, such as portable bathrooms and shower facilities.

As City Manager and the Cambridge Commissioner of Public Health, you both made clear in your March 19, 2020, Declaration of Public Health Emergency that it has been determined that immediate public action is needed in order to prevent or minimize the spread of COVID-19 by and among the people of the City of Cambridge. As the Cambridge Police Commissioner and Cambridge Chief Public Health Officer, after consultation with the ETF, we believe that it is critical that the City take immediate steps to prepare for, respond to, and mitigate the spread of COVID-19 without further delay, especially for our most vulnerable population. The ETF concurs that the recommendation to use the War Memorial as a Temporary Emergency Shelter is the best and most timely option available to the City.

Finally, we recognize that some in the community may have environmental health concerns regarding the use of a school facility as a Temporary Emergency Shelter during a Public Health Emergency. We also understand others may have concerns that the use of the War Memorial as a Temporary Emergency Shelter will delay the eventual reopening of CRLS as an educational facility. We want to assure you that these considerations have been thoroughly discussed and vetted, and we believe that hosting an Emergency Shelter at the War Memorial will not pose an additional health risk to the reopening of CRLS. No activities associated with the Temporary Emergency Shelter will take place in academic areas of CRLS buildings. The City departments, clinicians, and area service providers have mobilized across the city to ensure that this is a successful endeavor that supports our most vulnerable residents on a temporary basis, and fully returns the facility to its original use. As part of the planning efforts, we are aware that the Mayor and City Manager have asked for and secured commitments from Harvard University and MIT to supplement additional classrooms, if needed, for CRLS if school is reconvened in May or June.

We agree with the ETF recommendation and respectfully request that you approve the War Memorial for use as a Temporary Emergency Shelter to support the city's COVID-19 response efforts. We strongly urge and recommend that the City act expeditiously on this proposal, so that we can collectively protect the health and welfare of our homeless community, our public safety community, hospital and healthcare professionals, and the entire Cambridge community-at-large.

Respectfully Submitted,

Branville G. Bard, Jr. and Claude A. Jacob, on Behalf of the Members of the Cambridge
Emergency Task Force