YSS To Open Winter Freeze Shelter At Hillcrest Soon

By ALAN OLSON
Staff Writer

WHEELING — Though an opening date remains up in the air, Youth Services System’s Winter Freeze Shelter soon will be returning to its new location at the former Hillcrest site.

The city of Wheeling had recently offered the space at the former OVMC building to YSS to continue operating its Winter Freeze Shelter, which normally opens in mid-December. Betsy Bethel-McFarland, Director of Communications for YSS, said a definite opening date for the shelter is uncertain while the space is cleaned and the employees trained.

“This week, our maintenance team is in there, assessing the situation, looking at it if we need to fix anything or that everything’s in shape,” Bethel-McFarland said. “We also have our team of employees that will be working for the Winter Freeze Shelter. It’s a seasonal job and we have a few new employees, so we need to get them trained.”

The normal opening date for the shelter is Dec. 15, but Bethel said there is a chance it could open sooner. Tied into this is the possibility that a homeless encampment near 18th Street could be cleared out, which may necessitate an earlier opening date.

The shelter was held at Hillcrest for the first time in 2020, which was a dramatic improvement in living conditions, Bethel-McFarland said. While normally hosted at the Hazel-Atlas Building with dorm-style accommodations, the expanded living space afforded at Hillcrest was a boon not just for the residents’ warmth, but for their temperaments.

“It was fantastic. It was so great. The people that came to stay with us were thrilled to have private rooms, showers, their own bathrooms,” she said. “In years past, … it’s been more of a dorm-style environment, with shared bathrooms and no showers. This facility is way, way better.

“… It worked out really well. We served 194 individuals between Dec. 14 and March 15, and had very few issues, I think simply because people were happier to be in this place. They were grateful and didn’t want to make any waves, to make sure we’d be allowed to come back. We’re thrilled that the city has invited us to come back.”

Please see WINTER, Page 3