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Where the Washington area's poor and homeless give and earn their two cents

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Gales Shelter To Reopen Downtown

By Fiona Clem

Although the District government closed the Gales Shelter last spring, the city has now decided to renovate and reopen it by Nov. 1, bringing much-needed shelter space to the downtown area.

The Gales School, located at 65 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, was closed on March 31, 2004, after a long battle to keep it open. The closing displaced more than 100 men and more than 50 women. The women went to the John Young Center in the Community for Creative Non-Violence building, and the men went to the New York Avenue shelter.

Homeless advocates, most of whom were critical of the initial closing, welcome the reopening of the Gales School because shelter spaces downtown — close to jobs and service providers —

are few and far between. And the need for shelter space in downtown D.C. is particularly important during the cold winter months. In fact, though bed space this winter has not been at capacity citywide, most downtown shelters have been at capacity every night. The Franklin School, located at 13th and K Streets, NW, has 170 beds and has been at capacity since it opened for the hypothermia season, but at other shelters, beds are available.

“New York Avenue and 801 E Street for men and John Young for women have served the downtown homeless well, but in the downtown area, 150 beds would be significant,” said Chapman Todd, Catholic Charities’ regional director for D.C. housing and support services.

Homeless men and women expressed

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A homeless man braves the night near a Metro stop in Downtown Washington. (Photo M. Jones)

New Hypothermia Plan Still Leaves Many on the Streets

By Gwen Arnold

Early January's unseasonably warm temperatures were a reprieve for homeless people who often are vul-

such as La Casa Shelter in Ward 4, filled to capacity and set up extra cots to avoid turning people away.

Mary Ann Luby, outreach director at the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless, said that two homeless men



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the same sentiment. Patricia Henry, who now stays at the John Young Center, said that the new shelter would be centrally located near drop-in centers, feeding programs and other services homeless people will use in the daytime.

“It will be good to have another shel-

ter downtown and it will be much more accessible than others,” she said.

The Gales School shelter opened in late 2000 as a temporary hypothermia shelter but remained open year-round because of increased demand. The building, which was in terminal disrepair, was originally set to close on September 19, 2003.

Closing was postponed until Dec 19, 2003, and then at the last minute, the city decided to keep it open for the rest of the hypothermia season.

The announcement of Gales’ reopening as a shelter came as a surprise, because the city had initially decided that the space would be renovated to accommodate the D.C. Children’s Advocacy

Center, which serves abused children.

The main reason for the closing of the Gales School was safety, and the decision regarding the children’s center was based on space, according to Lynn French, senior policy advisor for D.C.’s Office of the Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth, Families and Elders. “The building had not been used fully because of safety concerns, and we want to completely renovate it,” French said.

However, she said that the city decided that the Gales School could not accommodate the proposed children’s center, since adding more space would cost more than the \$7 million the department has allocated for the construction.

“The fact,” said French, “was that the space was just too small. So we found them a bigger space and decided to renovate the Gales School and put it back in the shelter system.”

The new shelter will serve as a homeless assistance center and will provide bed space and important social services for the homeless. It has yet to be determined what gender the shelter will serve, but French said that it would definitely be

single sex.

The city has planned an environmental study, which will then go to an architect for proposed plans. The construction costs will not be determined until the architectural plans are approved.

“It will be an ambitious project,” French pointed out, “but we believe that it will be beneficial, and we hope to finish the project by November 1, 2005.”

When the school was closed last April, only about half of the building’s space was being used due to safety concerns. So how many beds the school will provide is not yet known.

Todd of Catholic Charities, which ran the Gales shelter before it closed, is looking forward to the reopening of the building in a refurbished state.

The school needs a lot of work, Todd said. “But there was a lot of good thought, time and energy put into planning of the New York Avenue Center.” And he believes that the city put the same effort into the renovation for the C