

# County seeks more money for homeless shelter at urging of state

■ Grant would be used to buy, renovate facility, preferably ex-day care center.

A request submitted last week for state funds to establish a homeless shelter in Ozaukee County grew by more than half a million dollars after state officials encouraged local officials to do so.

Officials with Ozaukee County and Family Promise of Ozaukee County, a Port Washington-based nonprofit group, submitted an application on Friday, Feb. 26, for more than \$1.97 million, up from their initial request of \$1.34 million, after officials with the state Community Development Block Grant for Coronavirus program said the extra money is needed to create a unit for homeless single men that would be separate from single women and families.

The funds will be used to cover the cost of acquiring a building, renovation work and shelter operation. The shelter is projected to serve 50 households or 125 people annually.

The preferred site is a 4,800-square-foot former day care center on 2.87 acres at the corner of Sunset Road and Highway LL near the Ozaukee County Justice Center in Port Washington, according to the application to the state.

The building will offer enough space for eight rooms, each with a private bath and small kitchen space.

The former day care center was built in 1995. Its listed sales price is \$429,900. The building would be renovated and expanded to 6,000 square feet at an estimated cost of \$850,000.

An offer has not been made on the property, which has been on the market for some time.

Supr. Lew Herro, a member of the Health and Human Services Committee, which approved the application, questioned the expense of buying and renovating the property.

"I think you're spending more money than you need to spend," he said. "It would be better to buy land and build something new."

"We felt the corner is a great corner for this purpose," Kathleen Christenson Fisher, chief executive officer of Family Promise of Ozaukee County, said.

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## Shelter: Nonprofit would operate facility

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Ozaukee County, said. "Real estate is tight, very tight, in Ozaukee County. We didn't see anything available right now we could use."

The shelter would be operated by Family Promise and open 24 hours a day, seven days a week and be staffed by a shelter manager, a part-time case manager and five shelter assistants.

Its annual operating budget would be \$344,000, according to the application.

No county tax dollars would be used to purchase, renovate or operate the shelter.

The county's involvement is limited to the grant application, officials say.

The need for a shelter became acute in 2020 after local churches could no longer house homeless families due to Covid-19 restrictions even as the need increased because many people doubling up in residences were forced to separate, officials said.

To meet the growing need, Family Promise rented up to 10 rooms at a time at a local hotel, spending \$15,000 a month, to house homeless families and individuals.

The number of households sheltered by

Family Promise grew from 21 in 2019 to 56 in 2020 and from 40 individuals to 113.

The number of households served but not necessarily housed increased from 56 to 185 and the number of individuals from 129 to 450.

Money spent on rent assistance more than quadrupled, from \$61,218 in 2019 to \$259,931 in 2020.

"This is a rare opportunity," Supr. Kathy Geracie, chairman of the county Health and Human Resources Committee, said. "We have applied for grants in the past, but we weren't able to achieve them."