

# Augusta nonprofit group plans homeless shelter expansion amid rising need for families

[centralmaine.com/2018/03/12/augusta-nonprofit-group-plans-homeless-shelter-expansion-amid-rising-need-for-families/](https://centralmaine.com/2018/03/12/augusta-nonprofit-group-plans-homeless-shelter-expansion-amid-rising-need-for-families/)

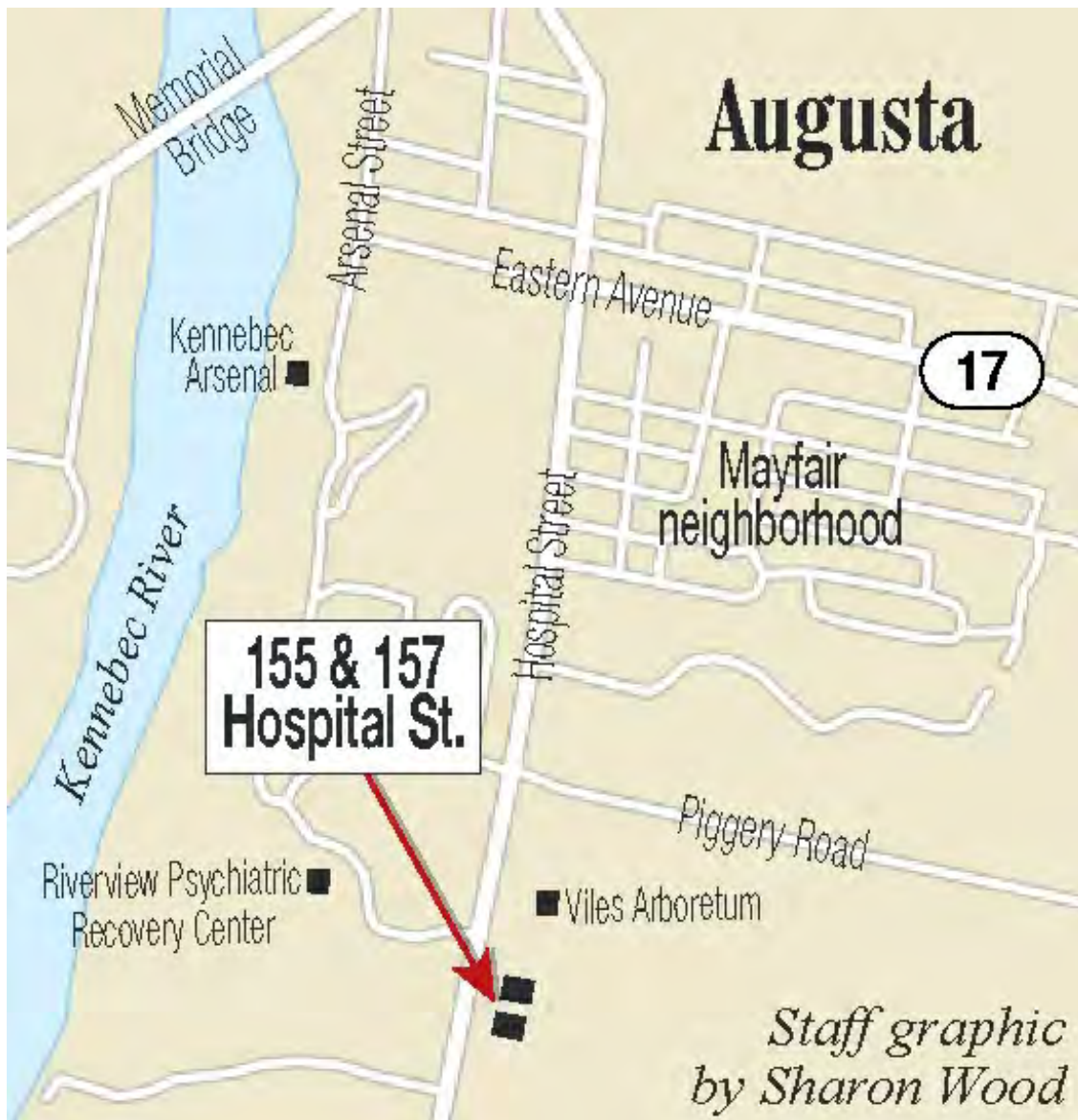
By Keith Edwards

March 12, 2018



AUGUSTA — Bread of Life Ministries is planning an expansion that would add 14 beds to its now 26-bed homeless shelter for families in Augusta after years of often being filled to capacity and forced to turn people away over a lack of space and beds.

The proposed expansion by the nonprofit group would include a two-story addition to the Hospital Street emergency overnight shelter, enough space to add four bedrooms, an office for use by caseworkers, and much-need storage space to hold furniture and other items donated to the shelter.



## Related Headlines

- [Augusta officials mull 2018 goals, including city-owned homeless shelter](#)



Search photos available for purchase: [Photo Store](#) →

John Richardson, executive director of Bread of Life Ministries, said on average the shelter turns away between five and 13 different people or families each a month, because there's not enough room for them at the shelter.

"We've had years and years of having to answer that tough question, 'Do you have room for me?' with the answer of 'No,'" Richardson said. "Tracking our turn-away data, we've reached a place where it was time to say we've got to do something about that, we've got to stop turning people away when they're in need."

Shelter officials also propose to expand Bread of Life's shelter for veterans, which is adjacent to the family shelter, by adding three new bedrooms to provide more space and privacy for users of the facility, which takes up to 12 veterans a night.

Richardson said plans to expand the veterans' shelter would double the number of bedrooms it has, from three to six, add another full bathroom, and double the size of the building's cooking and eating space, so everybody will be able to eat together at once. He said the shelter currently contracts with VA Maine Healthcare System-Togus to provide space for 12 veterans.

The new space could eventually provide space for more veterans, but for now will at least give veterans using the facility now more space.

"We'll go from stacking 12 men in three bedrooms to putting them in six bedrooms," Robinson said. "Dealing with all these things most of these men are, to be stacked together in a tiny space is just not helpful."

One of the new bedrooms and the new bathroom will be on the first floor of the veterans' shelter, providing the shelter, where all the other bedrooms are upstairs, with a bedroom accessible by veterans with mobility problems.

The family shelter last year provided beds for at least one night to 143 different people, 47 of whom were children, while the veteran's shelter averages about 100 different veterans a year staying there for at least one night.

In a typical month the family shelter would get between 35 and 60 phone calls a month from people seeking shelter when the shelter had no space for them. Richardson said some of those calls could have been the same person calling multiple times. The shelter's new way of counting "turn aways," is to only count people who call or come seeking assistance and can't get into the shelter that month, or don't find other housing within a month. By that measure, the shelter has had between five and 13 turn aways a month, though some of those five to 13 turn aways could be entire families, not just one person.

The addition would allow the shelter to add 14 beds, expanding its capacity from 26 to 40 people.

"We're in a position of having a goal, a vision, to turn no one away," Richardson said. "That's where the dream and vision started, with our board making that commitment. When you look at the number of people we turn away, there is very much a need there."

The expansion will also add an office, which Richardson said will increase the efficiency of caseworkers who see clients at the shelter because now, with only one office for them to use, only one caseworker can meet with a client at a time, while with an additional office, two caseworkers could each see different clients at the same time.

Rob Gordon, executive director of the United Way of Kennebec Valley, which provides some funds to the shelter, said he's in favor of expanding the shelter and that Bread of Life provides valuable services in the community.

“There is a great need for the service they do,” Gordon said. “Bread of Life does a wonderful job working with families and helping people get into the workplace, or back into the workplace. They have a really good handle on working with people and helping them get back in the mainstream.”

Richardson said MaineHousing data shows that 90 percent of the people Bread of Life houses don't return to homelessness.

The two expansions, together, are expected to cost about \$420,000, not including furnishings.

Richardson said the late Constance Merriam, a local woman who died in January of 2016, left money to Bread of Life, including about \$165,000 that will be used for the expansion.

The remaining \$255,000 needed to pay for the project will need to be raised from donors. Anyone wishing to donate to Bread of Life may call the ministries at 626-3434, and donations can be made through its [website](#).

The proposed expansion of both of Bread of Life's shelters, at 155 and 157 Hospital St., was scheduled to go before the Planning Board Tuesday, but the meeting was canceled because of the expected snowstorm entering the region. The proposal is now scheduled to go to the Planning Board on March 27. Shelters are considered a conditional use in that area, which is in the city's Institutional/Business and Professional District.

The family shelter expansion would add 1,244 square feet to 155 Hospital St., and the veterans' shelter expansion would add 888 square feet to 157 Hospital St.

Richardson said they hope to start construction this summer and have the additional shelter space in use before next winter.

*Keith Edwards — 621-5647*

*[email protected]*

*Twitter: @kedwardskj*

Share

[Read or Post Comments](#)

[Send questions/comments to the editors.](#)





Wake up to the local news you need

---

**Enter your email** and our daily headlines will be delivered to your inbox each morning.