

Community Takes Recreation Center for Unhoused People to Survive the Cold

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When: March 10th 2022, 8:30pm

Where: Carla Madison Recreation Center (2401 E Colfax Ave)

Denver, CO– It will be 10 degrees tonight and the City of Denver refuses to open up a Recreation Center as a warming shelter for unhoused people to stay. Unhoused neighbors are on the streets tonight asking for a safe place to stay warm, so we are going to stay at the Carla Madison Recreation Center. If the City will not open the Recreation Centers for this life or death need, we will just have to do it ourselves.

We are here to keep this public Recreation Center open to the public so unhoused neighbors can stay here tonight to survive this weather.

Unhoused neighbors are freezing, at risk of losing limbs to frostbite, catching hypothermia, or dying. We have met too many unhoused people this winter who have lost limbs to frostbite. We will not stand for this when there are warm public buildings ready to be open for people in desperate need.

The City has an existing contract with Bayaud Enterprises to run a pop up emergency shelter at Recreation Centers in extreme winter cold. They had this contract all this year and never used it. The City Council just voted to renew this contract again, but the City continues to not use these ready resources to open up the needed shelter for cold nights.

The reality is the existing shelters are not accessible or workable for countless unhoused people. On extra cold nights at least a hundred more unhoused people go into shelters for the night than on warm nights. This over maxes the shelter system where people are sleeping in every nook and cranny. This winter we have witnessed people show up to the shelter and be turned away for lack of space. We have witnessed people show up to the shelter and be told they could not stay because they are on a "Ask to Leave" list. We have witnessed people stuck on the streets wanting to be in shelter but not wanting to take the risk of going to the existing shelters where they have had dangerous experiences. Denver needs to open Recreation Centers as emergency cold shelters in this weather to create a safer, more accessible space for all who need it and to decrease the chaos at the existing shelters on these cold nights - to help people survive.

The City should be responding to the cold by doing all they possibly can to make warming options accessible for everyone based on everyone's needs and circumstance so no one freezes outside. This means the City needs to provide hotel vouchers for people who cannot do any kind of group shelter for many different reasons. The City needs to increase street outreach so that anyone who is on the streets and needs warm gear or a ride to a warm place gets it. And the City needs to stop all sweeps in cold weather - there is no justification for taking unhoused people's only gear to stay warm and kicking people out of their tents forced to move their property blocks in the freezing cold and snow.

We are here at Carla Madison Recreation Center because the City is not doing what is needed to protect our unhoused neighbors so we are forced to remain in this building to keep it open ourselves. So all may survive.