

Frequently Asked Questions on Implementing State Requirements for Special Needs Housing

The City of West Hollywood is in the process of implementing the state-mandated removal of governmental constraints on special needs housing. This requires changes to the Zoning Code. Proposed zone text amendments include shifting emergency shelters from an allowable use in residential neighborhoods with a Conditional Use Permit to a permitted use in limited commercial areas, subject to detailed development standards.

What is Special Needs Housing?

Special needs housing is designed to meet the needs of individuals and families that cannot obtain and/or maintain permanent, affordable housing or that have lost housing temporarily. Special needs populations include the elderly, persons with disabilities, victims of domestic violence, and the homeless. The types of facilities are generally differentiated by the length of stay. Many have onsite or offsite services that assist the residents in life skills, job training, etc. The four types of special-needs housing, as defined by the state of California are:

Emergency Shelters	Immediate and short-term housing with minimal supportive services for homeless persons or families (6 months or less)
Transitional Housing	Temporary rental housing intended for occupancy by homeless persons or families transitioning to permanent housing (6 months to 2 years)
Supportive Housing	Permanent affordable housing with no limit on length of stay
Single Room Occupancy (SRO)	Residential facility providing individual secure room/s for one or two person households (monthly or longer)

What is SB2 and what does it require?

State Senate Bill No. 2 (SB2), passed in 2007, amended Government Code Sections relating to local planning for homeless populations. SB2 requires cities to identify a zone or zones where emergency shelters are allowed as a permitted use without a conditional use or other discretionary permit. The bill also limits the city's allowable review on special needs projects such as transitional and supportive housing; they must be treated as any other residential use in the same zone. Other similar legislation targets Single Room Occupancy housing and outlines site availability and the allowance for development standards. The City's adopted Housing Element, as part of the General Plan (2011), described how the special needs housing regulations are to be addressed.

How have other cities dealt with this issue?

All jurisdictions in California are subject to this legislation. Culver City, Pasadena and Santa Monica all allow emergency shelters by-right in specific commercial (and industrial) districts. Beverly Hills recently adopted Code changes to allow emergency shelters by-right in specific multi-family residential zones. Transitional and supportive housing is treated like other residential uses, similar to our proposed approach.

Will my neighborhood be affected?

As proposed, emergency shelters would be permitted in the portions of the Community Commercial Districts 1 and 2 land use zones that have frontage on Santa Monica Boulevard and are outside the commercial-only overlay district. Proposed shelters would be required to comply with detailed development standards to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of the residents and the surrounding neighborhoods. Single Room Occupancy

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housing (SRO) would also be allowed on this portion of Santa Monica Boulevard, subject to a Conditional Use Permit. Transitional and supportive housing will be allowed in all residential districts as a permitted use, as long as the development is designed to function in the same manner as the other housing types in that district (i.e. as a single family or multi-family dwelling).

Why Santa Monica Boulevard?

Santa Monica Boulevard was identified during the General Plan process in 2011 as the most appropriate area for emergency shelters due to access to transit and other services and to minimize any potential impact on residential neighborhoods.

How many new shelters could be built?

The City must allow enough shelters to house its homeless population (currently 48 persons). Once that need is satisfied, any additional shelters would require a conditional use permit in order to be approved.

Are there plans to build a homeless shelter in the City?

No, there are no plans to construct a homeless shelter in West Hollywood.

What is the likelihood of a new shelter being built?

There are currently very few funding sources for establishing emergency shelters. Current practices have moved from a focus on shelters, to placing people directly into permanent housing with supportive services, and have proved successful in meeting the needs of very vulnerable people. For example, the City was awarded 20 housing subsidy vouchers to use over the next five years to help people access permanent housing. Further, if funding was available, land values here make it extremely unlikely that West Hollywood would be the chosen location.

Where are homeless shelters allowed now?

Currently the City allows emergency shelters in residential zones with a conditional use permit. There have been no applications to operate a homeless shelter in West Hollywood since 1990.

Are there any homeless shelters in West Hollywood?

No. The West Hollywood Homeless Organization operated successfully on the second floor of a warehouse building located just off the corner of Santa Monica and La Brea Boulevards from 1990 to 2000. With a capacity for 65 people, the program offered much-needed resources for the central west side of the County. When the Gateway Center was built, PATH (People Assisting the Homeless) merged with West Hollywood Homeless Organization at a new, much larger location in east Hollywood where it still provides services to homeless from West Hollywood and elsewhere.

What is the homeless population in West Hollywood?

The City conducts annual census counts of people who are homeless. For the past several years, there were approximately 60 people who spent the majority of their days and nights in the City. The evening population dropped to 48 with this year's homeless count conducted on January 31, 2013.

Where can I find more information?

For meeting notices, staff reports and more detail on SB2 and special needs housing, go to: www.weho.org/SB2.