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In Worcester, new shelter's opening delayed until April Homeless will continue to use PIP

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WORCESTER – The former People in Peril shelter at 701 Main St. will have to get the city's homeless through the winter, because the long-delayed shelter on Queen Street will not open until spring.

In August, a spokesman for the Framingham-based South Middlesex Opportunity Council, which operates the shelter, said the new building would be ready this month. But Wednesday, she estimated it will not be done until April.

The delay is at least the second for the Main Street shelter closing since the City Council voted in 2011 to allow it to temporarily reopen. It had closed Feb. 1, 2011, and was replaced by a temporary triage and assessment center run by Community Healthlink at 12 Queen St., and SMOC began the work to open a new facility. Construction at 25 Queen St. got under way in August.

“The delays were caused by ... engineering challenges that were much more involved than originally anticipated,” said Jane Lane, a communications consultant who is SMOC's spokesman. “From everything I'm hearing, this construction crew is working diligently trying to make up for lost time.”

Wednesday, the site at hilly 25 Queen St. was busy, but the structure was not weather-tight. Eventually, the building will hold 25 dormitory-style beds for people who need emergency shelter and 15 beds in single rooms for people in more stable situations who are closer to permanent housing. For now, however, the structure's plywood and Tyvek shell is missing windows and doors.

SMOC is in charge of both the former PIP shelter at 701 Main St., which is now called the Greater Worcester Housing Connection, and the new facility, which will bear the same name.

The general contractor for the project, Holliston-based Themeli Builders Inc., referred questions about the schedule to SMOC.

The shelter on Main Street has between 40 and 50 people, which appears to be higher than usual because of the recent weather, Ms. Lane said. Earlier in December and more generally, clients usually number in the thirties, she said.

That's a drop from when SMOC was allowed to temporarily resume operating the former PIP shelter despite neighborhood opposition, on Dec. 1, 2011. That day, there were 60 people there. The lower census is the result of

more aggressive efforts to connect people with services and move them toward permanent housing, Ms. Lane said.

While the new facility is under construction, people in need of shelter can simply show up at 701 Main St., she said.

A city spokeswoman did not return a call and email for comment about the delay. Ms. Lane said the city manager's office had been informed.