

the **Vineyard** church

Love God. Love People. Period.

Dear City Council,

My name is Melissa Hassebrock, and I serve as the Office Manager at Duluth Vineyard. I've been assisting with the implementation of the Safe Bay program at Duluth Vineyard this year.

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to reflect His compassion. Time and again in the New Testament, Jesus is moved with compassion toward those in need. At the Vineyard, we are committed to living out that same kind of love. Tangible, compassionate, and genuine love extended towards those who are often overlooked. We believe every person in our city deserves to be seen, valued, and supported with dignity and care, as a reflection of God's heart.

The Safe Bay program aligns with our mission to serve others in practical and respectful ways. It offers individuals and families living in their vehicles a safe, undisturbed place to park overnight, along with access to restrooms and showers. Simple, essential needs that are often taken for granted.

At a time when so many in our community are struggling, Safe Bay offers a compassionate, practical response rooted in our faith and our values. We understand that new efforts can raise questions and concerns, and we remain committed to working transparently, collaboratively, and responsibly with our neighbors and local leaders.

We have been open to conversations with neighbors and community members. We have held two neighborhood meetings and if Safe Bay is allowed to reopen, our plan is to host a neighborhood meeting on the second Thursday of each month. We have worked to address concerns through conversations, thoughtful consideration, and, when applicable, with action.

Our first neighborhood meeting held on March 26, 2025 was well attended. At the meeting three main concerns were consistently brought up by neighbors. The biggest concern was trespassing and what steps were being taken to prevent guests of Safe Bay from wandering off of church property. The other concerns were the attraction of wildlife due to increased garbage and litter. We thoughtfully considered our neighbor's concerns and came up with the following steps to hopefully alleviate their concerns.

1. Garbage and Litter:

We provide additional garbage bins in the parking area for guest use. They are emptied into our wildlife-proof dumpster and stored away once quiet hours begin. Our dumpster has a metal lid to deter animals.

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Last year, summer 2024, we did have an issue with a bear getting into our garbage and strewing trash all over. Last year, we switched to a bear proof bin. This bin has a heavy metal lid that cannot be opened by bears. We continued to use this type of collection bin during months with increased bear activity (April - October).

In the week that Safe Bay was operational here, we did not see an increase in litter in our parking lot or surrounding area. Guests used the trash receptacles provided. Staff were consistent about picking up trash that missed the bin and taking the garbage out to the dumpster for disposal. In addition, we never found any evidence of drug use or discarded needles in our parking lot. Guests also picked up after their dogs using the waste disposal bags provided.

2. Trespassing Concerns:

We are aware that some neighbors have expressed concern about people walking through their woods near their homes. While these concerns are not directly related to Safe Bay or Duluth Vineyard programs, they have contributed to heightened sensitivity around increased foot traffic on private property. To help ensure that all guests respect property boundaries and nearby residential areas:

- Clearly marked signs have been installed along the church property line.
 - Orange signs reading "Vineyard Church Property Line - Please respect our neighbors" were placed along the North and East sides of our property.
 - Neighbors expressed that prior to Safe Bay, they experienced frequent trespassing. We found what appeared to be a worn trail from our parking lot through the woods towards the neighbor's property. To discourage the use of this existing trail, we temporarily installed a green snow fence preventing people from easily accessing the path they were used to walking.
- A temporary 6-foot fabric screening (like that used by CHUM at the Damiano Center) has been installed along the north side of the parking lot to create a physical and visual boundary, adding privacy for both neighbors and guests.
 - The snow fencing and fabric screening were installed during a week where we had sustained winds of greater than 20 miles per hour and several thunderstorms moved through our area. Both the snow fencing and fabric screening fell during this time. We reinforced the posts, added additional zip ties, and tie outs to help stabilize the posts and fencing.

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- On Tuesday, June 2, 2025 we are going to reinstall the posts holding up the fabric screening. This change will provide more stability for the fence and should prevent it from falling again.
- Additional screening will also be installed along the burm to address neighbor's concerns that we need to screen the entire North side of the parking lot.
- A rule requiring guests to remain on church property has also been added to Safe Bay's guidelines. As always, those who do not follow the rules will be asked to leave, and repeat offenders will no longer be allowed to participate.

3. Wildlife Concerns:

To reduce attraction to wildlife, open trash bins will not be left out overnight. Safe Bay staff and volunteers perform walk-throughs of the lot every 30 minutes to ensure the safety and well-being of all guests. Our guests value a peaceful, safe space and attracting wildlife would be counter to their own interests. Increased human presence and lack of accessible waste will also help deter animal activity.

Some additional concerns were brought up in the appeal.

4. Lack of Adequate Toilet Facilities:

There are two single stall restrooms available near the rear of the church where Safe Bay operates. When needed, guests can also utilize the men's and women's restrooms located in our lobby. Each restroom has seven stalls.

5. Maximum Occupancy Limits:

The application was approved for a 50 person limit, well above the maximum numbers Safe Bay has seen in the past two years. On average they had 10 guests per night and the highest number they saw was around 25.

We strive to meet the expectations laid forth by the city in our permit. If we somehow found ourselves at maximum occupancy, we would need to take alternative measures to ensure the safety and security of staff, guests, and neighbors. Senior CHUM staff are available to overnight staff and volunteers to help navigate these situations should they arise.

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6. Fencing:

At our first neighborhood meeting back in March, the question of fencing was brought up. The neighbor's asked if a privacy fence was going to be installed. At that time, we were anticipating grant money to help cover the costs of implementing Safe Bay. Barry Schull, our Compassion Ministries Director, replied that we would not be able to afford a six foot privacy fence but might be able to consider a chain link fence. Barry's goal was to convey that we would consider fencing and that funds were not available to accommodate their desire for a privacy fence. The absolute best we would have been able to do was a chain link fence due to budget constraints.

That grant money was denied because at the time awards were given out, we were still without an approved permit. Without that additional funding, we do not have money available for the construction of a permanent fence. Instead, we have been utilizing posts with attached screening material to meet the screening requirements.

7. Mechanics:

The intent is not to operate a commercial auto repair service or bring in a fleet of mechanics. These are limited, minor repairs (such as jump starts, tire fixes, or battery replacements) and basic maintenance that help prevent people living in vehicles from becoming stranded or having to abandon their vehicles. These services are more about basic safety and functionality than ongoing mechanical work.

For individuals experiencing homelessness, especially those living in their vehicles, access to basic vehicle upkeep is essential. Their vehicles often serve as both transportation and shelter. Preventing them from making small repairs may cause more disruption, increase the likelihood of abandoned vehicles, and reduce safety for all.

While vehicle repair may not be a historic church function, offering support and care to the community is a core mission of our church. Allowing basic vehicle maintenance aligns with our commitment to serve those in need in a compassionate and practical way.

8. Drug and Alcohol Use:

Like many community-serving organizations, Safe Bay's enforcement approach balances compassion with accountability. That means they respond immediately to visible violations, safety concerns, or illegal behavior. While they strive to treat everyone with dignity and respect, they also maintain clear behavioral expectations and consequences for violations, including removal from the site if necessary.

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Safe Bay provides more than just a place to park. It offers safety, dignity, and stability to individuals and families facing housing insecurity. By meeting essential needs like restrooms, showers, and a secure space to rest, Safe Bay creates a bridge to stability, connection, and hope. It is a practical, compassionate response to a growing need in our city. We are committed to serving with compassion while remaining attentive to the needs and concerns of our surrounding neighborhood.

We do not take our role lightly. The feedback from our neighbors and the guidance of city leadership have shaped and strengthened our approach. We remain committed to continuous improvement, open communication, and collaborative problem-solving.

We respectfully ask the City Council to support the reopening of Safe Bay. This is not just about parking lots or policies, it is about people. With your partnership, we can continue offering practical, compassionate support to those in need while being good neighbors and faithful stewards of the space we've been entrusted with.

Thank you for your time, your leadership, and your consideration.

With gratitude,

Melissa Hassebrock
Office Manager, Duluth Vineyard