FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hope Covenant Church Shelter Inspected

*Village seeks correction of health and safety violations*

**Orland Park, IL (November 6, 2019)** - On Wednesday, November 6, 2019, representatives of the Village of Orland Park delivered notification to Hope Covenant Church identifying at least 28 health and safety code violations created by the operation of an overnight shelter in a building intended to be used solely for religious services. The correspondence requests immediate compliance from Hope Covenant Church to discontinue its overnight shelter activities until the fundamental safety issues can be addressed for the intended use and the building is brought into full compliance with all Village codes to ensure the well-being of its users.

In late October 2019, the Village worked with Church Pastor Jon Fogel to schedule members of the Village’s inspection staff to review the shelter operations and the facility from which they function. The use was reviewed in conjunction with applicable building, health, life, safety, plumbing, accessibility, fire, electrical, and mechanical codes. During the inspection, it was revealed that church volunteers establish temporary sleeping rooms for overnight shelter in the basement of the church; an area with insufficient fire and carbon monoxide protections, a lack of code compliant exits, and deficient accessibility standards, all of which negatively impact the safety of individuals utilizing the overnight shelter.

“First and foremost, we are charged with protecting and maintaining the health and safety of the community, its residents and visitors; the sleeping arrangements utilized by the church does not meet these basic standards ,” said Orland Park
Mayor Keith Pekau. “We cannot simply look the other way on such critical life safety protections,” he added.

The violations stem primarily from the change in use from religious services to an overnight transient residential use. “Especially in light of the transient nature of the users, it is important to make sure that critical safety protocols such as proper egress paths, exit stairways, accessibility, emergency lighting, and smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are all accounted for,” said Village Manager George Koczwara. “The Village has requested that Hope Covenant Church retain the assistance of professional architectural and/or engineering services to ensure the facility is properly retrofitted to maintain these standards,” he added. Until necessary protocols are met, the facility cannot be operated in a safe manner.

Although meals are provided to users of the facility, the Hope Covenant Church building does not contain a full commercial kitchen, nor has it been inspected as such. No Certified Food Protection Manager was present to account for proper food handling protocols. Should food be catered in, proper serving utensils and single serve dishes that would be required were not present at the time of the inspection.

In addition, Hope Covenant Church must pursue proper zoning to operate an overnight use, which will require an amendment to the Village’s allowable uses, a public hearing before the Village’s Plan Commission, and a Village Board vote. “While all parts of the process are equally important for conversion of one use to another, I cannot overstate the risk associated with ignoring fundamental building safety standards,” said Pekau. “These were developed to keep everyone safe and our ultimate aim is to avoid any consequences that arise from failing to follow those standards. The Church had previously agreed that it would comply with all of the appropriate Village laws, codes, and ordinances regarding the use and operation of the Church as overnight housing for these individuals and the assurance of a healthy and safe environment for the occupants is a priority we would expect the Church to share.”

For more information, contact the Village’s Office of Public Information at publicinfooffice@orlandpark.org.

###