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## Nassau plans to stop housing homeless to area motels

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Nassau County will stop sending homeless people to stay in area hotels and motels by the end of the year, officials said yesterday.

The shift began in January with the Long Beach Motor Inn in Island Park, said Mary Ellen Zimmerman, assistant director of the housing unit of the Nassau County Department of Social Services.

The 67-room Island Park motel has been cleared of most of the seven homeless individuals and 13 families that were staying there, Zimmerman said. The county is placing them with a community-based organization.

Nassau began with that motel because of the complaints of community members, who perceive the homeless population to be dangerous. Nassau police officials say many of the calls they receive about the hotel are for medical assistance or domestic disputes.

In emergency situations, Nassau County gives \$100 a day in housing money to homeless families and individuals, who then are responsible for finding shelter in a motel.

As of April 18, Nassau County had 35 homeless families and 27 homeless individuals sheltered in area hotels and motels.

"Motels are our last resort," Zimmerman said.

In Suffolk, county authorities said they made a concerted effort to reduce the number of homeless housed in motels, which peaked in December 2004 at 202 men and women. In the past two months, four families were housed in motels. Last year, the average was five families per month.

Nassau County is contracting with Community Housing Innovations, a Patchogue-based group, to house 12 families and four individuals from the Island Park motel, said Karen Garber, a spokeswoman for the Nassau County Department of Social Services.

Tonight, Social Services Commissioner John Imhof is scheduled to address the topic before Island Park residents at a community meeting at 7 p.m. at the Island Park Public Library.

Patti Ambrosia, president of the Island Park Civic Association and chairwoman of the meeting, said she's been worrying about the Long Beach Motor Inn for the last few years.



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"I think it's the loitering, hanging out in the parking lot with lounge chairs ... It's just an uncomfortable feeling," Ambrosia said, adding she also didn't like the idea of children living there. "The community would like to see this hotel shut down."

Yesterday's drizzly weather found few people in sight at the motel. A few late-model cars were parked in the lot.

The motel is fighting 53 summonses issued by the town of Hempstead, mostly on issues of overcrowded rooms, having cooking appliances in a sleeping area and occupancy over the town's limit of 30 days, said Mike Deery, spokesman for the town.

William Bird, a Westbury attorney who represents the Long Beach Motor Inn, said he wondered whether the anger at the motel was motivated more by a desire to keep Island Park free of the homeless.

"The Long Beach Motor Inn runs an establishment that is not seedy," Bird said. "I would ask these community advocates to ask themselves - where do they want to place these individuals? I hope it's not a question of anywhere but our backyard."

Staff writer Michael Amon contributed to this story.

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