



## **HOMELESS RESOURCE CENTER ISSUES RESPONSE**

In an effort to further assist City of West Palm Beach Commissioners, City staff and City residents in understanding the Homeless Resource Center (HRC) operational model, additional information is being provided in this document on three (3) issues: allowance for walkups; funding for the facility operations; and plans for additional resource centers.

### **1. Walk-up/Engagement Rationale – A Key Best Practice Initiative**

Most individuals and families facing homelessness are in such a position due to a significant life trauma. Ease in accessibility to services offered in a welcoming and engaging atmosphere is critical for people who have been broken down and seek assistance. This is a nationwide Best Practice, a critical component of the Ten-Year Plan, and the philosophy of the proposed HRC and those that will follow.

Positive interactions and engagement are key to motivating and supporting individuals as they move through this transition time. The key to successful implementation is engaging the homeless to change.

The average person seeking admission to an HRC is not the stereotypical chronic homeless individual. They are not individuals who have chosen homelessness as a lifestyle, but are individuals, often with families, who require and desire assistance moving themselves out of their homeless state. Allowing individuals who are ready to enter on their own and motivated to end their homelessness will greatly enhance the likelihood for their success on the path toward self-sufficiency.

Limiting admission to those accompanied by law enforcement or other customary referral source despite access to other means of transportation has, in other communities, resulted in law enforcement and referral sources serving as a 'taxi service' for those wishing to access services. For example, a single mother with three children who are sleeping in their car have the ability to drive themselves to the center, but would instead be required to call to request a police officer to accompany them. This is an inappropriate use of law enforcement resources that will impact the availability of officers for response to emergency events, degrade response time to emergency events, and will result in additional costs to the taxpayer. Referral requirements are also thought to create similar adverse and unintended consequences for other customary referral sources, such as withdrawal from service delivery and heightened operating costs to realize system-wide objectives.

The primary purpose of the proposed HRC is to provide a central access point for the homeless and nearly homeless who are seeking housing and associated homeless services. Limiting admission to those with referrals from other organizations negates the Center's objective to streamline the intake and referral system and adds unnecessary hurdles for an individual who is already struggling. To this end, the accessibility impediments presented by admission limitations stand in direct conflict with the principal operational concept of the proven HRC model and proposed HRC facility.

An individual that seeks services and undertakes the effort to transport himself or herself to the HRC, but is not permitted to enter upon voluntary arrival, may be left stranded in the neighborhood. Non-referred admission does not exacerbate, but minimizes the potential for vagrancy, loitering and ancillary concerns under such an operating scenario. For this reason, County staff contends that public interest is upheld, community concerns with presence of homeless addressed, and integrity of the facility protected through preservation of some walk-up admission capability.

#### Resources/Best Practice Models (Shortlist of Examples)

Phoenix, Arizona

<http://www.lodestardrc.org/>

Atlanta, Georgia

<http://www.gatewayctr.org/FAQ.asp>

Los Angeles, California

<http://www.epath.org/services/pathmall.php>

[http://www.epath.org/toknowus/awards/nchv\\_bestpractice.php](http://www.epath.org/toknowus/awards/nchv_bestpractice.php)

Austin, Texas

<http://www.frontsteps.org/what-we-do/arch.html>

## **2. Operational Costs**

The County is working on a detailed operating budget which will be updated regularly in the months ahead as facility planning and operator selection progress. The budget and funding sources will be discussed and approved by the Board of County Commissioners with public input at various upcoming meetings.

Anticipated revenue sources to fund the operating costs of the West Palm Beach HRC include:

- Reallocation of up to \$500,000 in contractual services funding within the County Department of Community Services adopted budget.
- Designation of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) public services allocation (max. 15% of total allocation) and Emergency Shelter Block Grant (ESGP) funds to the HRC. This will generate approximately \$1M annually.

- Incorporation of revenue streams linked to and committed by the not-for-profit agency selected to administer programs and services at the HRC, the Health Department (medical) and possibly other service providers operating at the center (amount to be determined).
- Development of a cost sharing strategy to cover security costs of the HRC. The costs would be applied to those municipalities who opt to refer the homeless to the HRC.
- Procurement of private donations, foundation grants and interagency service contracts or funding agreements.

The HUD grants (CDBG and ESGP) noted above are recurring funds that vary in amount from year to year. Preliminary indications are positive that in the immediate future, the amounts will be increased. Finally, the Homeless Advisory Board and County staff will be evaluating options for a dedicated revenue stream to sustain the operations of multiple centers and the associated services necessary to sustain the system of care into the future.

### **3. Additional Resource Centers**

The proposed facility on 45<sup>th</sup> Street in West Palm Beach is intended to be the first in a network of regionally-located facilities servicing Palm Beach County residents.

By way of background, the Board of County Commissioners established the Palm Beach County Homeless Advisory Board in May 2007. This Board was chartered with the task of preparing and overseeing the *Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Palm Beach County*. The combined efforts of the members of the Advisory Board and a multitude of service provider representatives led to the adoption of the plan by the Board of County Commissioners in September 2008.

A critical component of the plan is the development of regionally located homeless resource centers throughout the County to engage homeless individuals and families and to provide needed services. The resource centers will typically have interim beds for short stays prior to placement in permanent or transitional housing.

The proposed HRC on 45<sup>th</sup> Street in West Palm Beach is made possible largely as a result of a \$7.5M federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) grant, in combination with other existing and projected funding streams and sources. NSP funds are awarded through a competitive allocation process and require expenditure within a defined timeframe following the award to remain in good standing. The NSP grant award in question requires all funds to be encumbered by September 2010 (18 months following the March 2009 award date) with project completion no later than March 2013. The County is diligently proceeding in a manner that ensures adherence to these deadlines, as the competitive nature of NSP grants preclude extensions and jeopardizes the ability to secure future awards following a default. Accordingly, it is imperative to the proposed and future HRCs, as well as future funding potential for such facilities, that Palm Beach County capitalizes on the existing NSP award to the fullest extent.

The County is currently evaluating locations in western Palm Beach County (Glades) for the next HRC. Locations in south and north Palm Beach County are also anticipated in the future. The timing of the additional facilities will, to a large extent, be determined by funding availability. Although City and County budgets have been under a considerable amount of stress due to reduced property values and reductions of tax revenues, availability of federal grant funds for housing, neighborhood stabilization and other social service programs has increased and thereby creates new opportunities for facility and program expansion. As is evidenced by the NSP grant award previously referenced herein, the County is well-positioned to take advantage of these opportunities and others to create the network of HRCs envisioned in the Ten-Year Plan.

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