

Non-Congregate Sheltering Strategy for the Western Communities

Frequently Asked Questions

June 13, 2020

1. What is non-congregate sheltering (NCS)?

Non-congregate sheltering means locations where each individual or household has living space that offers some level of privacy which is interpreted as its own room and sanitary facilities.

2. Why is NCS relevant in relation to the coronavirus emergency?

Given that the coronavirus most easily spreads from person-to-person, non-congregate sheltering has been the preferred option to care for those in need of isolation.

3. How is Palm Beach County providing for NCS throughout its jurisdiction?

The County secured six (6) reservation/buyout agreements that provided it access to over 350 hotel rooms. Agreements were secured in all geographical regions of the County with the West region being the only exception.

4. What is the *Non-Congregate Sheltering (NCS) Strategy for the Western Communities*?

The NCS Strategy for the Western Communities proposes the renovation and use of two County-owned facilities to provide for a multisite non-congregate sheltering operation serving those in need of isolation due to the coronavirus emergency. The facility located in Belle Glade (formerly occupied by Jerome Golden Center, Inc.) will serve as the Intake and Assessment Center. A second facility located in Pahokee will provide 42 one bedroom/one bath units for families, seniors, couples and singles. The units will be used for emergency housing up to 90 days and supportive housing up to 24 months; all the while receiving individually determined wrap around services.

5. How will the multisite NCS operate?

Immediately upon opening and while the need for COVID related sheltering exists in the Western Communities, these facilities will provide for sheltering of those requiring isolation due to COVID19 related cases. The spectrum of those underlying reasons is ample and includes, but is not limited to: those testing positive to COVID19, those exposed to COVID19 and those that may have lost their housing accommodations due to the emergency.

At the Belle Glade facility families, singles, youth and seniors will receive a full assessment for services and will be entered into the coordinated entry system. If identified as being at high risk of, or positive to, COVID-19 and have no other non-congregate housing option to achieve the isolation, the individual and/or families will be assigned an emergency shelter unit in Pahokee.

The six individual sleeping rooms at the Belle Glade facility will provide for housing while being evaluated for an emergency or supportive housing placement. The Belle Glade facility will be in continuous operation, Staff and security will be on site to ensure smooth transition into the site and comprehensive services. Only individuals and/or families with a referral will be brought to Belle Glade facility for evaluation. Non-referred individuals, also known as “walk-ups” will not be permitted, and this location will not be used as a feeding site. Those in need of isolation will be referred to the Pahokee facility and transported to the Pahokee facility if the person(s) does not have their own transportation.

The Pahokee facility will have a resident manager onsite and provide for continuous operation, including provision of daily security services. Isolation protocols call for those in isolation to stay inside their assigned quarters, outside interaction being limited to medical staff. To ensure operational soundness and adherence to sheltering best practices, the units at the Pahokee facility will be distributed to ensure that there is separation amongst the different population groups being served.

6. How will the facilities be used once the coronavirus emergency is over?

When the need for COVID relating sheltering has diminished or been eliminated, the intake process into the Pahokee facility will allow the County to provide to the participants services that align with the County’s *Leading the Way Home, a Plan to End Homelessness in Palm Beach County*. The Plan calls for expanding supportive services; providing increased access to housing solutions in our community; and enhancing the Homeless System of Care. Consistent with the Plan’s approach, each homeless household admitted to the non-congregate sheltering facility at Pahokee will be assigned a case manager to secure safe and affordable permanent housing. In some cases, placement into permanent housing will take longer for a variety of reasons. In these instances, and once past the COVID19 emergency, the Pahokee facility will align with the County’s long-term goals of providing supportive housing units for stays up to 24 months.

7. What services will be provided at the Belle Glade and Pahokee facilities?

Services to be provided include, but are not limited to: assessment for shelter; health and behavioral health evaluation; referrals to other services; emergency overnight housing; access to hygiene services; access to mainstream resources; clothing and food as required; and onsite security. Administrative and support personnel will be onsite at the Belle Glade facility, in a planned operation which resembles that of the previous not for profit organizations.

The Pahokee facility will operate as any other apartment complex with the added benefit of having a resident manager onsite. The fact that each of the 42 units provides a fully independent kitchen, bedroom, bathroom and living area, facilitates sheltering of individuals, seniors, as well as families. The facility is being modified to include access control to the perimeter of the facility and throughout the facility. The County to assign families to wing of the facility dedicated only to families.

8. Who will operate the facilities?

The County will remain responsible for the management and oversight of both facilities. Services will be provided through a combination of County employed case managers and social workers and a contracted operator. The contracted operator will manage the facility operations, and coordinate service delivery of the various not for profit partners.

9. What operational provisions/restrictions have been considered for this project?

Several operational conditions have been identified at this point resembling those the County has implemented at other locations, for example: admission of any individual that is registered as a sexual predator, sexually violent predator or sexual offender will be prohibited; the County will implement and enforce protocols to address resident curfews and unauthorized client arrivals/departures; the County will develop and enforce a Comprehensive Security Plan, including a “no loitering” policy; and except for the use of designated outdoor client areas and recreational facilities, all recurring daily operations, programs and activities shall be conducted indoors.

10. Has the County operated similar projects?

Yes, since the beginning of the coronavirus emergency, County Staff has been responsible for coordinating all non-congregate sheltering. As it relates to the long term operation, for over eight (8) years the County has successfully managed the Lewis Center located in West Palm Beach.

11. Has the Strategy been approved by the Board of County Commissioners?

Yes, on June 2, 2020 County Staff presented the proposed Strategy to the BCC and approval was granted to implement it.

12. How much will it cost to implement the NCS strategy? Who will fund the project and operation of the facilities?

Current estimates indicate that up to \$5,000,000 in capital improvements will be needed at the Pahokee facility and will be funded with CARES Act monies as part of the County’s response to the coronavirus emergency. Combined annual operating costs are estimated at \$2,200,000 and will be included in the County’s budget, likely a combination of ad valorem and federal grant sources. In summary, the County will fund the entirety of the capital and operating budgetary needs; there is no ask to the Cities.

13. What would happen to the facility in the event that the County determined that there was no longer a need for the facility as proposed, or the County could no longer fund the operating expenses.

That would be a decision made by the Board of County Commissioners sitting at the time. Based on the Board’s current priorities, the next likely use be to reuse the investment of public dollars

toward providing housing which is attainable by families and individuals with incomes in the extremely low, very low and low income categories.

14. Why is the project proceeding under an expedited schedule?

The nature of the coronavirus emergency and the lack of viable options to provide non-congregate sheltering for the Western Communities triggered the expedited review, analysis and planned implementation of this project. County Staff had been assessing the Pahokee property in the months prior to drafting the Strategy and upon receipt of engineering assessments realized that renovation and reutilization of the facility would be possible, presenting an invaluable opportunity for the Western Communities.

15. What makes the expedited approach possible?

No changes in use are being proposed for either property. The uses contemplated under the NCS Strategy for the Western Communities are similar to the uses that were in place before the facilities became vacant. The Belle Glade facility has been historically used by various *not for profits* as a mental counseling services center. Just a few months ago it was vacated by the Jerome Golden Center, Inc. Similarly, before being foreclosed by the County, the Pahokee facility operated as an apartment complex for the elderly. The continuity in the proposed uses ensures simplification of the project, which becomes a renovation, renewal and replacement effort.

16. What level community engagement is planned?

A Neighborhood Oversight Panel will be formed and supported by staff of the County's Community Services and Facilities Development and Operations Departments to monitor the facilities' operations.

17. How will the *Non-Congregate Sheltering Strategy* help the Western Communities address the public health challenges posed by the coronavirus emergency?

As of June 3, 2020, the data published by the Florida Department of Health regarding the incidence rate of COVID19-positive cases showed that the City of Belle Glade constitutes a "hot zone", with South Bay and Pahokee tracking close by. The lack of an easy-to-implement non-congregate sheltering strategy for the Western Communities precludes the local residents from isolating as a result of having tested positive or having been exposed to the coronavirus. According to the CDC, the homeless population, including households who reside in hotels or in places not meant for human habitation are considered High Risk and are in need of protective housing. Therefore, identification a viable, local alternative for non-congregate sheltering for the Western Communities was deemed as an urgent need in dealing with the public health emergency created by the coronavirus.

18. Will this shelter be for residents of the Western Communities only?

Yes, with the exception of sheltering cases resulting from domestic violence incidents (which may require preferential placement to ensure distancing between the victims and the perpetrators), the shelter will be focused on the residents of the Western Communities.

19. How will this project benefit the Western Communities?

In the short term, this project will address the non-congregate sheltering needs of the residents of the Western Communities who might be in need of isolation as a result of the coronavirus emergency. This should help in the management and containment of the virus spread. In the long-term, this facility will align with the *Leading the Way Home, A Plan to End Homelessness in Palm Beach County*.

Immediate benefits include, but are not limited to: renovation of the two currently vacant facilities, which ensures their upkeep and sanitary conditions; provision of construction work for the local workforce; and economic activity as a result of the project investment.

Continuing benefits include: local job opportunities in the management of the sheltering operation, additional access to the wide variety of programs and services offered by the Community Services Department including those tailored toward veterans, seniors and migrant farmworkers, and families, and overall the nurturing that leads to more resilient communities as the program proposed for the multisite operation heavily relies on local ties and engagement for its success.

20. How can I obtain additional information about the NCS Strategy for the Western Communities?

County Staff of the Community Services and Facilities Development & Operations departments stand ready to answer your questions. You can reach Community Services by phone at 355-4772 or by email at WTippett@pbcgov.org. You can reach Facilities Development & Operations by phone at 233-0215 or by email at AWolf@pbcgov.org