



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Ken Snipes, Homeland Security and Emergency Management

DATE: June 20, 2023

SUBJECT: **Staff Update: Resolution No. 20230209—040**

On 9 February 2023, City Council passed [Resolution 20230209-040](#), which directed the City Manager to make recommendations to expand the City's weather sheltering plans to include all extreme weather events, to receive feedback from stakeholders and subject matter experts to address activation, registration, transportation and other issues related to the response to sheltering during extreme weather events, to recommend how to best accommodate on-site and remote shelter registration, and to make recommendations on how to implement a waiver of registration requirements.

Staff Update

Recommendations to expand the City's weather sheltering plan to include all extreme weather events.

Staff recognizes that extreme weather shelters offer a safe haven for individuals who may be at greater risk due to extreme heatwaves, cold snaps, storms, or other hazardous weather events. Austin Public Health and the Homeland Security and Emergency Management Department have begun the process of updating policies regarding extreme weather sheltering with drafts in the initial review process. The drafts include considerations such as pausing encampment cleanups for 72 hours after a shelter deactivation and addressing both hot and cold weather events. This process is on target to meet the October 2023 implementation date found in the Emergency Shelters for Dangerous Temperatures Audit Report.

Expansion of a City of Austin shelter into Del Valle requires overcoming substantial jurisdictional issues that would impact funding capability. City of Austin facilities in Del Valle include a fire station, water treatment complex and an energy center, none of which is suitable for sheltering. Identifying a suitable location for a new shelter while considering factors such as accessibility, proximity to public transportation, availability of infrastructure (water, electricity, etc.) in addition to jurisdictional complexity poses a challenge.

Soliciting feedback and suggestions from the stakeholders and subject matter experts to address activation, registration, transportation and other issues related to the City's response to sheltering during extreme weather events.

The current cold weather sheltering contract has alleviated many of the staffing concerns regarding sheltering.

HSEM recognizes soliciting feedback regarding cold weather shelters is crucial to assess their effectiveness, identify areas for improvement, and ensure that the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness are being met. By actively seeking and incorporating feedback, cold weather shelters can better address the needs of their residents and provide an environment that promotes safety, dignity, and support during harsh weather conditions.

During the February 10, 2023, cold shelter activation, Downtown Austin Community Court (DACC) provided a survey to individuals who utilized the shelters to solicit feedback. 39 people responded to the survey which asked them which parts of the cold weather shelter process worked well and did not work well. DACC will be soliciting more feedback and lived experiences during the Austin Homelessness Advisory Committee meeting on June 21, 2023.

Other areas of possible improvement identified by Council include requiring training in de-escalation and trauma informed care as well as conducting coordinated assessments during activations. The current sheltering contract does not require de-escalation and trauma informed training, but this could be addressed in future contracts. Likewise, coordinated assessments are not contractually required or city funded. Assessments sometimes occur with the collaboration of the crisis team. Staffing issues have made it difficult to regularly conduct assessments.

Austin Public Health continues to work with community advocates to provide more shelter activation notice opportunities. Collaboration with outreach teams and the crisis response committee continues and improvements to the text alert system, including data sharing agreements, continue to be explored.

Recommendations on how to best accommodate on-site and remote shelter registration.

There were significant issues with the existing registration and transportation to shelters this past year. DACC redesigned its lobby to be more trauma informed for its clientele which also reduced lobby capacity. This resulted in persons needing shelter having to wait outside for transportation. In addition, CapMetro relies on staff pulled from existing routes to provide shelter transportation, resulting in delays from the individual's arrival at the registration point to the shelter. While One Texas Center can be utilized for registration in the future, it cannot serve as the sole registration point in the future.

Emergency Medical Services relies on the registration census information to determine the appropriate location as it transports discharged persons from medical facilities to shelters.

Make recommendations on how to implement a waiver of shelter registration requirements in the case of a State of Disaster declaration by the City or Travis County or an extreme weather event.

It is not recommended that registration requirements are waived. Individuals in need are not denied shelter upon registration. Registration allows Austin Public Health and its partners to ensure that capacity limits are not exceeded and eliminates transportation issues resulting from individuals attempting to “walk-in” at a shelter location that has already reached capacity. In addition, registration allows specific needs to be met including sheltering people with legal requirements and people with animals.

Due to safety concerns, Austin Public Health and its partners do not disclose shelter locations. Capacity dictates the opening of shelters. Allowing “walk-ins” could result in people arriving at a shelter not yet available. In addition, addresses are not disclosed for the safety of domestic violence victims.

To allow staff to update policies and procedures according to the timelines set in the Emergency Shelters for Dangerous Temperatures Audit Report staff respectfully extends the due date for an initial report to Council to November 15, 2023. Quarterly updates will be provided to Council in the interim.

Should you have any questions, please contact me at 512-974-1926.

Cc: Jesús Garza, Interim City Manager
 Bruce Mills, Interim Assistant City Manager
 Adrienne Sturup, Austin Public Health Director