



PROPOSED HOMELESS RESOURCE CENTER 2 (HRC2)

Responses to Public Questions and Comments

Public Outreach Meeting 1

March 14, 2019

County Staff offers the following responses to a portion of the questions and comments that were raised by attendees of the March 14, 2019 community meeting. An effort has been made to present each question/comment and response in a logical order by grouping those of a similar nature in proximity to one another, as opposed to the order in which they were raised or any perceived level of importance or significance. Additional coordination efforts remain ongoing, and a supplemental set of responses to matters not addressed herein may be released at a later date prior to the April 24, 2019 follow-up community meeting.

Comment: Identifying the property by a Lake Worth Road address is misleading since the property has no direct vehicular access to Lake Worth Road.

Response: The property's 3680 Lake Worth Road address reflects a longstanding assignment by the Palm Beach County Property Appraiser's Office, which was assigned independent of any direction by or coordination with any County department or staff involved with the HRC2. The address has been stated in meeting invitations and other materials solely for consistency with the Property Appraiser records, and for correct identification of the subject property by any member of the public utilizing the Property Appraiser Public Access (PAPA) Internet system. In no way has County staff intended to mislead or deceive any interested individual or misconstrue factual information by representing the address of record for the subject property.

Question: Was property at the County's Park Airport (LNA) considered for siting the facility?

Response: Properties under the control of the County's Department of Airports are subject to Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations, which limit such lands to direct support of airport operations or revenue generation to offset the cost of airport facilities and operations. As such, lands that comprise LNA are not eligible for development of the HRC2.

Comment: John Prince Park is better suited for siting the facility, where land is available that was formerly considered for siting a Major League Baseball (MLB) spring training facility.

Response: John Prince Park remains programmed for public recreation facilities and improvements toward satisfying the level of service set by County policy as well as various deed restrictions that encumber much of the Park. The Stadium would have provided a new multi-purpose venue for community events outside of the Spring Training Season, and the facility at large would have delivered a number of baseball fields for public use as well as improved the condition of the existing informal soccer/multi-purpose fields, both of which further the public recreation mission of park land. The unimproved areas of John Prince Park, which are not subject to the deed restrictions, are currently being used informally for their mission until future funding becomes available for more formal improvement(s).

Comment: West Palm Beach would be a better location for siting the facility.

Response: The Lewis Center (HRC1) is situated in the City of West Palm Beach. So too is a County-owned housing complex for families experiencing homelessness. The County's approach is to strategically situate HRCs countywide to create a regional network of facilities to address localized instances of homelessness. Hence, consolidating all such facilities in any single municipality or area is not consistent with the County's approach to addressing local homelessness. As demonstrated by Point in Time Count statistics presented by County Staff, the Lake Worth/Palm Springs/Greenacres/Atlantis area has been found to contain the second highest concentration of homeless individuals in all of Palm Beach County (behind only West Palm Beach/Mangonia Park/Riviera Beach, which is directly served by the Lewis Center), which explains the geographic siting for this second regional facility.

Comment: The subject site was not ranked in the top seven (7) properties identified by County staff for siting the facility.

Response: As represented during the meeting presentation by staff, the subject site was known by staff to be a strong candidate for consideration immediately upon commencing the siting evaluation. For that reason other sites were identified and ranked for purposes of comparison against the subject site. If the subject property were added to the list of ranked properties, that number would increase from seven (7) to eight (8), with the subject site being ranked one (1) and all others then being ranked from two (2) to eight (8) accordingly.

Comment: The site is spot zoned for government use and services.

Response: The site's Public Ownership (PO) zoning designation is consistent with numerous properties throughout unincorporated Palm Beach County that support public facilities of all types. The County's Comprehensive Plan declares the PO Zoning District to be consistent with all future land use categories, such that no instance of spot zoning applies to the PO Zoning District when all established standards for such zoning assignment are satisfied. To ensure the ability to deliver service and achieve the level of service established by the County, it is often imperative to site facilities in proximity to the area served. Regardless of a final siting decision, there is a high probability that any site selected in the unincorporated area of the County would already have or be proposed for a PO zoning designation.

Comment: There would be no enforcement of the Operating Provisions developed in support of the facility due to the unincorporated property being under the jurisdiction of the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) as opposed to another entity having regulatory authority.

Response: As represented during the meeting presentation by staff, a deviation from the 250-foot separation distance from residential use would require approval by the BCC as part of any final decision to site the HRC2 in this location. The County's Unified Land Development Code (ULDC) allows the BCC to approve such a deviation with or without conditions of approval. Staff would intend that the Operating Provisions be incorporated as part of a BCC approval of the deviation, such that they are conditions of approval of a development order and thereby enforceable. This is no different than any other development order (with or without conditions) granted by the BCC to accomplish County development programs and objectives. As further reassurance, and in the event of a BCC approval, staff would propose recording the approving document and the Operating Provisions attached thereto into the public records of Palm Beach County for official review and any future enforcement action that would arise in the instance of noncompliance with any of those provisions.

Comment: Traffic generated by the proposed facility is a concern to the community.

Response: As previously mentioned herein and represented during the meeting presentation by Staff, the subject site has a valid approval for a 25,000 square foot building supporting in part a 114 child daycare. That approved operation includes 1,560 traffic trips per day, with 169 during the AM peak hour and 179 during the PM peak hours. By comparison, a HRC generates an estimated 200 traffic trips per day (1,360 or 87% less) upon accounting for client transportation, staffing, referrals, and deliveries, with that volume being relatively steady throughout the course of daily operation as opposed to any peak periods. As further comparison, if the site were constructed with the maximum number of residential dwelling units permitted by County regulations (i.e. 25-40 dwelling units), traffic generation would be estimated at 200 to 320 traffic trips per day, which is equivalent to the impact of the proposed HRC2. If programmed for some other non-residential use, traffic generation could approach or exceed the volume that is associated with the 1,560 trips per day that would be created by the approved building and daycare.

Comment: Coconut Road has no speed bumps to slow traffic.

Response: County staff involved with HRC2 anticipate the facility having no traffic impact that would necessitate the installation of speed bumps. However, should the actual operating experience demonstrate otherwise, County staff will commit (with a corresponding Operating Provision) to further pursuing this improvement with the County's Engineering and Public Works Department or other agency having authority over this public roadway.

Question: How many stories and buildings are proposed for the HRC2?

Response: The proposed plan of development consists of an approximately 19,000 square foot single-story building that would support the entirety of the operation but for customary outdoor site improvements (i.e. parking, drainage, lighting, recreation, landscaping and the like).

Comment: Lessons should be learned from facilities in other locations.

Response: A HRC is not a local experiment, but rather a nationally accepted model and best practice for homelessness prevention and service delivery. The model used by the HRC is a nationally recognized model using a housing and implement focused approach. Additionally, the community has implemented Coordinated Entry, also a nationally recognized best practice, to ensure that all people experiencing a housing crisis have fair and equal access and are quickly identified, assessed for, referred, and connected to housing and assistance based on their strengths and needs. It is also important to note that lessons learned have played an important role in the design of our HRC. For instance, residents are no longer required to leave at 7 a.m. and not come back until 4p.m. which provoked loitering, encampments, etc. and are not the practice of the HRCs. Services and case management are provided 24/7 and loitering is not permitted at any time.

The County has closely monitored the operation of the Lewis Center in West Palm Beach throughout its six (6) full years of operation. County Staff intend to tailor the Operating Provisions that apply to the Lewis Center to the HRC2 in order to replicate the same level of success and protections for the surrounding community, while at the same time applying experiences from the Lewis Center to the design, construction and operation of the HRC2 and any/all others that follow. Educated, trained and qualified professionals will administer daily services to ensure that the appropriate level of expertise and experience is applied toward successful facility operations.

Question: What is the recidivism rate following client completion of the program?

Response: Based upon results from the Lewis Center, 66% of persons leaving the Lewis Center enter permanent housing programs in the community. Approximately 31% either returned to homelessness or refused to report their living condition at exit. 20% of the 31% who voluntarily exit or refuse to report their living condition return to the Lewis Center for additional services. The remaining 3% exit to medical care.

Question: How are clients monitored?

Response: The sole goal of a HRC is to provide shelter to persons while they seek employment and permanent housing solutions through nonprofits, housing authorities, diversion services or the private market. Each client is assigned to an individual Case Manager to assist the client in obtaining that goal. The client and Case Manager jointly develop a housing focused plan that documents the services being provided, progress made, employment schedule, any unacceptable conduct, and so on. While the Case Manager retains primary responsibility for monitoring client activity throughout their enrollment in the program, additional monitoring is accomplished throughout the full complement of personnel and on-site infrastructure that uphold daily operations of the facility and program delivery.

Question: How are homeless individuals transported to and from the facility?

Response: The Lewis Center does not accept walk-ups (i.e. individuals having no advance referral, active enrollment or prior permission). Such arrivals occur on average once per day. All persons entering the facility are either picked up by the operator of the facility, transported by bus to the site, arrive in their own cars, or are brought by community non-profit providers, local law enforcement or other acquaintances. No person is seen at the Lewis Center without an appointment. Persons coming without an appointment are given referrals to community resources, receive diversion services such as relocation locally or out of area with family, or are given an appointment time. Non-referred walk-ups are rare as word in the community travels and persons seeking services are aware that sheltering services will not be offered unless they have gone through coordinated entry and have appointment. This has proven successful for the Lewis Center, and as such is also the operating approach proposed for the HRC2.

Comment: The HRC2 provides no services to families experiencing homelessness, which is the population of least concern to the neighborhood.

Response: Families will initially be seen at the facility for intake and assessment, just as they are at the Lewis Center, and then placed into units at Program Reach (a 19 unit facility funded by the County and operated by Adopt-a-Family for families), hotels/motels or other appropriate housing as is the current practice. The goal is to place families into facilities with individual cooking abilities with services being provided to the family in their environment. This allows case managers to assess the needs of the family as a whole, not just focus on the adult(s). It also allows families to be placed in areas near to the children's current school in an effort to not disrupt the children's education. It is essential that children do not experience additional trauma by losing their routines such as the loss of family dinners, bedtime rituals, etc. The concerns of the neighborhood do not simply go away with families, and in some cases would be worse as significant others, non-custodial parents and abusers can create more of an issue than the population of homeless individuals

Comment: Homeless persons have to be removed from public streets.

Response: The Lewis Center, HRC2 and other facilities which provide homeless prevention and wraparound services are intended to be a critical tool in responding to local homelessness. This is accomplished by combining an interim housing accommodation with a multitude of wraparound services that are necessary to deliver stability and return individuals that want to end their homelessness back to self-sufficiency.

Homelessness among single adults is often the result of the lack of affordable and obtainable housing. Because of the cost of housing coupled with inadequate incomes, or a temporary financial or life crisis such as losing a job, the end of a relationship, domestic violence, death of a partner, or health emergency can result in a loss of housing and homelessness. Despite common stereotypes, most homeless single adults do not suffer from chronic mental illness, substance abuse, or other disabling conditions. Most are homeless for a relatively short time before reconnecting to housing.

It is not illegal to be homeless. The U.S. Court of Appeals ruled that “As long as there is no option of sleeping indoors, the government cannot criminalize indigent, homeless people for sleeping outdoors, on public property, on the false premise they had a choice in the matter.” Furthermore, when cities pass laws against sleeping in public and other acts of survival, it is considered the criminalization of homelessness, which is a bad public policy. Criminalization does nothing to address the root causes of homelessness, makes it more difficult for people to exit homelessness, wastes scarce public resources, burdens the criminal justice system, and results in bad public relations for the community.

Comment: The Lewis Center has experienced a high number of both security incidents and individuals refused service according to County data.

Response: Upon completion of the sixth (6th) full year of operations in 2018, County data reflects 324 security incidents (which is further defined in the next paragraph) having occurred and 5,845 individuals and households were ineligible for service. Please see the response to the next question as to reasons for ineligibility/refused to be served. Sometimes the term “refused service” means that the client refused service, not the HRC refused to serve the person.

The Lewis Center’s *Comprehensive Security Plan* identifies a “security incident” as “all situations that require an emergency or non-emergency law enforcement response, emergency medical response, security assistance, and/or other formal attention by HRC security personnel.” Clearly, not all such incidents have a negative safety and/or security connotation and/or impact outside of the facility interior, but rather are incidents that require security personnel to complete a report for each such situation as a best practice for record purposes only. Examples include instances such as: 911 calls for emergency medical responses; a door or window being found in an unlatched position; private disputes between clients; and so on. Thus, not all 324 instances in 6 years (average of 54 per year, or 1 every 6.75 days) entails an occurrence that poses any threat to life, safety, health and/or welfare. In fact, an estimate of only 10 instances that posed such a

threat (i.e. physical altercation, verbal intimidation, entry by an unauthorized individual) are reported to have occurred during those 6 years.

The 5,845 refusals to render service (average of 974 per year, or 2.66 per day) reflects the integrity of the operation and stringent standards for client enrollment to protect the best interest of the surrounding community, facility personnel, and clients themselves. The facility does not accept individuals having: pending legal action; a history of having committed a sexual offense; illegal substances or possessions; need for heightened medical attention; behavior that is threatening to oneself or to others; possession of alcohol, drugs or other intoxicants; and/or other conditions that compromise the operation or likelihood of successful program completion. Thus, refusals reflect and represent the facility's commitment to a nurturing and wholesome environment only for those that are voluntarily and personally committed to ending or preventing their homelessness.

Comment: The financial proceeds being dedicated to the construction and operation of the facility should be spent to provide services for those refused service at a HRC.

Response: Individuals and Families categorized as "refused services" are in fact not qualified for services through the Lewis Center for a variety of reasons that are either inconsistent with the mission of the facility or other practices intended to protect the facility's clients, staff and neighbors, such as:

- 1) Not homeless and/ or seeking homeless prevention services (85% of population in this category)
- 2) Sexual Offender (3%)
- 3) Criminal Warrant (5%)
- 4) Not willing to be placed separate from a pet(s) (7%)

Question: Where do homeless individuals go or get directed to upon being discharged from the facility?

Response: A majority (66%) of persons leaving the Lewis Center are entering permanent housing programs in the community (i.e. affordable housing assistance combined with wrap-around supportive services). Of the remainder, 31% either voluntarily returned to homelessness or refused to report their living condition. Approximately 20% of those who exit without a permanent housing placement return to the Lewis Center for additional services and to access permanent housing. The remaining 3% exited to a treatment center or hospital for further care. No individual is simply returned to the street or offered no assistance remote from the facility, and each situation is addressed on a case-specific basis.

Question: How are children and seniors protected from facility clients?

Response: Importantly, enrollment to a HRC is a voluntary decision by those individuals looking to end their homelessness. The same is true for offering enrollment and service delivery to those individuals thereafter. Ending homelessness reduces threats and increases protection for the entire community, as individuals experiencing homelessness are otherwise left to public encounters and exposure in public areas (i.e. commercial establishments, roadways, sidewalks, etc.).

Protection begins through the background screening process that is protocol for gaining a referral to a HRC. Anyone having an open warrant, equivalent pending legal action or a history of having committed a sexual offense is prohibited from becoming a client of the facility. A physical screening is then conducted upon client arrival, whereby there is no tolerance for: illegal substances or possessions; need for medical attention that exceeds the capabilities of the facility and facility personnel; behavior that is threatening to oneself or to others; a physical presence of alcohol, drugs or other intoxicants; and/or other conditions that compromise the operation or likelihood of successful program completion. A high standard for personal conduct is then contractually required and enforced throughout the duration of service delivery for sustained enrollment at the facility. Unbecoming conduct is not tolerated at any time.

Additionally, a large number of homeless persons accessing the facility are themselves elderly. Those accessing the resources of the facility are concerned with employment and securing permanent housing as opposed to harassing the elderly or hurting children.

Comment: Transients will be drawn to the site and surrounding community.

Response: This has not been the case at the Lewis Center. There has been a decrease in the number of homeless overall in Palm Beach County as result of the Lewis Center and coordinating permanent housing and employment solutions. Since the Lewis Center opened in 2012, homelessness in Palm Beach County has been reduced, as evident through the annual Point in Time Count, by 39%. This site offers no on-demand access to feeding, transportation, mainstream resources access, or additional shelter services that make some homeless programs and facilities attractive to transients. Homeless persons are made aware throughout outreach, experience and word of mouth that without an appointment there will be no services rendered from the site. Upon enrollment, clients are not permitted to roam the area surrounding the facility, which is enforced through security surveillance, case management, custom case plans containing daily activity logs, and other best practices.

Comment: The facility poses a risk to the safety of local school-age children.

Response: As previously mentioned herein, clients undergo a background check prior to be granting a referral to a HRC, as well as a physical screening at time of arrival. Individuals that would pose a threat to the community are not permitted at the facility.

Northmore Elementary School in West Palm Beach is located just southeast of the Lewis Center, and is less than a ½ mile walking distance from door to door. There have been no reported incidents to students or the school that relate to the Lewis Center (directly or indirectly) at any time in the history of the facility. County staff has no reason to expect any different result from the siting and operation of the HRC2.

Comment: The estimated \$5M annual operating expense of the HRC2 is too much.

Response: The annual operating expense of the HRC2 includes emergency sheltering and wrap-around services, operating expenses and provides “back-end” services such as Rapid Re-Housing and permanent housing with case management attached. Housing in Palm Beach County is a high ticket item as evidenced by the fact that there are only 72,921 units of affordable housing available to the county’s 93,249 low-income renters,

leaving a deficit of 4,091 units. In addition to the lack of affordable housing, it is important to note that the hourly housing wage to afford a one-bedroom unit in the county is \$21.85, \$27.25 for a two-bedroom unit, and \$37.37 for a three-bedroom unit.

Comment: There is no guarantee of receiving a response to crime occurrences.

Response: County Staff contends that a HRC, due to its working relationship with partnering law enforcement agencies, brings a heightened law enforcement presence to the area surrounding a HRC. The proposed HRC2 is also planned to incorporate a PBSO field station providing offices and facility support services for patrolling deputies, as well as a multi-purpose room for various types of PBSO sponsored community programs. This heightened presence of law enforcement personnel on the street is also key to reducing crime.

Comment: Meetings alone do not create consensus.

Response: Staff is in full agreement with this comment. The purpose of the public outreach meetings is not to gain approval or influence personal opinion, but rather to gather thoughts, comments and concerns in order to develop a list of Operating Provisions to memorialize Staff representations, commitments and recommendations for implementation.