

# Emergency Shelter Facilities Response to COVID-19 and City Shelter Crises Declaration

In response to the COVID-19 emergency and the City's shelter crisis declaration, the City of San José is developing emergency temporary and interim shelter facilities for at-risk and unsheltered people, reducing the risk of the spread of COVID-19 to them and to the general public.

Specifically, an emergency temporary trailer shelter is located on a City owned parking lot near Story Road and Remillard Court. Given the emerging and dynamic nature of the COVID-19 response, a number of questions have emerged about emergency shelter facilities. City staff has developed responses to Frequently Asked Questions below:

## **1) Why is this happening now, and why so quickly without the typical levels of community input, regulation, and review?**

- California is under a State of Emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a highly infectious virus that may result in serious illness or death. Unsheltered people are more vulnerable to COVID-19 because they have limited access to sanitation like clean water and soap, are more prone to illnesses, and there is a significant lack of shelter spaces to meet the need of the over 5,000 people who are already living on our streets. Lacking a safe place to go indoors makes it impossible to meet the Shelter-in-Place Order. Unsheltered people, particularly older adults, and people with underlying health conditions, are at higher risk for severe illness.
- In March, the Governor issued Executive Order N-32-20 urging a focused approach to bring unsheltered Californians indoors by increasing shelter and housing inventory. The Order also suspended certain regulations if specific State funding was used to increase housing capacity during the State of Emergency. Soon thereafter, the City of San José received 104 trailers from the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) to be used to provide non-congregate shelter options for at-risk and vulnerable populations.
- Additionally, the Santa Clara County Shelter-in-Place Order not only directed residents to shelter in their place of residence, it urged governments to make shelter available for people experiencing homelessness. As San José residents shelter-in-place during the pandemic, the City's homeless community (over 5,000 are unsheltered) are among the most vulnerable. Emergency shelter and housing support our unsheltered residents and the general public by providing safe shelter for those with high risk of becoming ill, and spreading the virus to others.
- To address the public health crisis and the homelessness crisis, the City Council ordered a suspension of many local regulations applicable to shelters established during the COVID-19 emergency to speed shelter delivery, as well as declaring the continued existence of a shelter crisis by ratifying the City Manager's previous declaration. The proposed emergency trailer housing solution not only advances State and County objectives, it also responds to Council direction seeking to address these intersecting crises.
- While the County is currently leading isolation and quarantine efforts related to individuals who have tested positive or have been exposed to COVID-19 (primarily through the use of hotels/motels), the City will prioritize individuals at this site who are most vulnerable

(meaning they are older adults with underlying health conditions or have three or more severe underlying health conditions). Question three (3) below summarizes the City-County multi-pronged shelter plan that is addressing homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the County begins to increase COVID-19 testing and contact tracing, there may be a need for additional shelter for people with COVID-19, and or persons being evaluated for having contracted the virus, and this requires that the City retain the flexibility convert the site to meet this need if evolving circumstances dictate that necessity.

## **2) Why was this site selected without informing neighbors sooner?**

- On March 19 and 20, the City of San José received 104 trailers from CalOES with little notice to prepare for their arrival. Consequently, the City had to immediately identify a site large enough to accommodate 104 travel trailers on land the City controlled, enabling an emergency based response to prepare the site, receive the trailers, and begin refurbishing the trailers for habitation. Upon completion of reasonable trailer refurbishing efforts, 14 trailers were deemed uninhabitable, leaving 90 for available for shelter purposes.
- The City Council ratified an emergency order and shelter crisis declaration on April 7, 2020, allowing the City to respond quickly to State and County orders noted in question #1. The urgency of the public health crisis means City staff is doing many things concurrently, including standing up emergency mass shelters across the City, while conducting site evaluation and site planning for other temporary and interim emergency sites.

## **3) Is this site the City's only approach to addressing at-risk, vulnerable, and homeless populations during the public health emergency as well as the exiting shelter crises?**

- The City's Housing Department has been working urgently with its partners to address the immediate needs of our unsheltered residents to keep the public safe. For those living in large homeless encampments, the City placed hygiene equipment such as handwashing stations, portable toilets, and arranged for garbage collection to slow spread of COVID-19.
- Together with Santa Clara County, the Housing Department expanded temporary housing and shelter capacity in response to public health orders. To date, over 680 motel/hotel rooms are reserved across eight cities in the County, and over 450 temporary shelter beds are being stood up across several sites.
- The City also operates overnight warming locations, safe parking programs, and has stood up mass shelter sites during the COVID-19 crisis. Overnight warming locations have been hosted in Council Districts 3 and 6, safe parking programs in Districts 2, 3, and 7, and the mass shelters stood up in response to COVID-19 (Parkside and South Hall) are both located downtown in District 3. For many of the existing sites, hours of operation were expanded, including at 10 shelters, and the safe parking sites and overnight warming locations. A family shelter also recently opened in District 9 at the Camden Community Center. Bed capacity is also being used at an existing Bridge Housing Community and the Plaza Hotel.
- Additionally, the City opened its first Bridge Housing Community in Council District 3 off Mabury Road this spring and is currently developing its second site in Council District 7 off Felipe Road near Story Road. The City is currently developing three new emergency interim shelter/housing sites—one at Monterey and Bernal (Council District 2), a second at

Evans Lane (Council District 6), and a third at Rue Ferrari and 101 (Council District 2). All three sites are being flexibly developed to serve dual purposes as emergency interim housing sites and future bridge housing sites to address both immediate and future needs.

- Both emergency “temporary” and “interim” shelter in the City of San José is intended to be short-term or transitional housing. On-site services are provided to stabilize residents so that their basic needs are met including shelter, sanitation, and food. The distinction being that “temporary” facilities are on sites that have another current purpose (e.g. South Hall for convention purposes, Trailer site for parking purposes) and must be de-commissioned after COVID-19 and returned to its original purpose, whereas the “interim” facilities are on sites that did not have a previous use and may continue as Bridge Housing after COVID-19.
- The current City-County shelter plan is flexibly built to enable effective response to the public health crisis as it unfolds. As such, if the public health emergency demands it, changes will be made to housing sites to meet the public’s needs. As the County begins to increase COVID-19 testing and contact tracing, there may be a need for additional shelter for people with COVID-19, and or persons being evaluated for having contracted the virus, and this requires that the City retain the flexibility convert the site to meet this need if evolving circumstances dictate that necessity.

#### **4) Is this housing solution being built for homeless people from outside the County?**

- Every two years, communities across the United States conduct comprehensive counts of the local population experiencing homelessness. Known as the Point-in-Time Counts (PIT), this census and survey of people experiencing homelessness provides an overview of the number and characteristics of the homeless population in the community. As of the last PIT conducted in 2019, the City of San José had 6,097 people experiencing homelessness, with approximately 5,117 (84%) being unsheltered. Of those surveyed, 83% resided in Santa Clara County prior to becoming homeless. As such, the vast majority of San José’s homeless population are our residents, neighbors, families, and colleagues. If you would like to learn more about the 2019 City of San José Point-in-Time Count, you can access the full report on the Housing Department’s website (<https://www.sanjoseca.gov/home/showdocument?id=47511>).

#### **5) How will these emergency housing solutions be funded?**

- Governor Newsom signed SB 89 in March 2020. This emergency legislation authorized immediate funding, including support for local governments to protect the health and safety of homeless populations. The City also received Coronavirus Relief Funds allocated under the Federal CARES Act. The Administration anticipates applying funding to this project from either of these sources.

#### **6) When will this site be operational and how long do you anticipate it will remain open?**

- This emergency housing site is expected to be operational by mid May 2020. As this site will serve individuals or couples without children who are at risk of severe illness from COVID-19, the City anticipates the site being operational through the more significant stages of the pandemic and until Happy Hollow Park and Zoo (HHPZ) is ready to re-open. Both of these factors (the more significant stages of the pandemic and the re-opening of HHPZ) are inter-related as the pandemic must be contained sufficiently beyond the more

significant stages, and the County must make certain reduced shelter isolation need determinations (with the City); and issue re-opening orders lifting shelter in place, and allowing congregate activities like attendance at HHPZ to occur. Given the facility is designated as temporary, the City has initiated preliminary planning for future demobilization activities, which are expected to take between 30 to 60 days once a decision to demobilize is made.

## **7) Who will be eligible to live in these communities?**

- The City received the trailers from CalOES, which restricted trailer uses to provide non-congregate shelter options for people experiencing homelessness and who meet one of the following criteria: Individuals are 1) COVID-19 positive, 2) presumably exposed to the virus, or 3) at high risk of illness from COVID-19 per CDC guidelines.
- During the existing public health crisis posed by COVID-19, referrals into the program for single individuals or couples without children will be made through a central referral system that is coordinated with the City’s Housing Department, and jointly operated by the County’s Office of Supportive Housing and Valley Homeless Healthcare Program.
- For this site, the City expects to prioritize individuals or couples without children who are most vulnerable to severe illness from COVID-19, meaning someone has three or more pre-existing health conditions and/or there may be older adults with out mobility restrictions as this site is unable to make accessibility accommodations. However, as the County begins to increase COVID-19 testing and contact tracing, there may be a need for additional shelter for people with COVID-19, and or persons being evaluated for having contracted the virus, and this requires that the City retain the flexibility convert the site to meet this need if evolving circumstances dictate that necessity.

## **8) Who will operate and oversee the emergency trailer housing site?**

- The City is using an experienced homeless service provider to operate this site. Abode Services has over 30 years of diverse experience providing services to homeless populations and developing affordable housing. Abode’s housing programs serve nearly 4,000 people on any given night, providing safe, stable homes to families and individuals who would otherwise be homeless or at severe risk of losing their housing. Due to the declared state of emergency and shelter crisis declaration, and the urgent responses demanded by each to immediately shelter vulnerable individuals, Abode Services was selected to operate the FEMA trailer site without a competitive process.
- The City is committed to ensuring, to the best of our ability and capacity, that homeless residents have a safe place to shelter during this public health emergency. The City developed, in collaboration with Abode Services, a comprehensive management plan for this community that provides 24/7 on-site security, resident screening, hours of operation, property management, cleaning protocols, and community rules that include a no visitor/guest policy in compliance with the County Shelter in Place Order.

**9) How many trailers will be located on the site and what services will residents be offered?**

- CalOES delivered 104 trailers to the City of San José. However, 14 were deemed uninhabitable after the trailers were refurbished. Therefore, 90 trailers will be used to house residents.
- The City will take a three-phased approach to occupy the trailers, filling 30 trailers per phase. This will allow the City and Abode to address any necessary programmatic or logistical needs as they arise, and ensure a well-run facility that can address on-site needs.
- Services at this site will focus on stabilizing the residents, with the primary goal of providing safe shelter to help residents comply with the public health order. In addition, City staff will collaborate with Abode Services and the County to determine what additional supportive services and/or County public health or behavioral health related services are appropriate to include.
- The City is also providing essential services such as laundry, maintenance, and 24/7 security. Periodic onsite medical care will also be offered.

**10) What measures will the City and site operator put in place to monitor for COVID-19 and support participants who test positive?**

- Santa Clara County is currently the lead agency housing individuals who are positive for or have been exposed to COVID-19. Those placements are occurring at other County operated locations under the existing City-County shelter plan.
- While COVID-19 positive patients are not currently planned for this site, the infectiousness and severity of the virus demands that protocols be in place to prevent the spread of illness. For this site, this includes controlling site access to ensure that all individuals enter the site via one entrance and are screened by the security.
- During the COVID-19 crisis, the following protocols will be in place to protect residents, staff, and neighbors:
  - ✓ Temperature is taken upon entry and re-entry to the site;
  - ✓ Staff monitors residents for symptoms;
  - ✓ Commonly used areas, such as restrooms and kitchens, are sanitized frequently;
  - ✓ Site-specific cleaning instructions have been developed;
  - ✓ Hand sanitizer is available on-site;
  - ✓ PPE may be provided to residents who are coughing or upon request;
  - ✓ Social distancing is enforced in common areas; and
  - ✓ Staff is required to wear PPE.
- If someone in an emergency housing community displays symptoms of COVID-19, then the following steps will be taken:
  - ✓ If a staff member is symptomatic, they may be asked to leave immediately and not return until they have tested negative or been symptom-free for 14 days;
  - ✓ If a resident tests positive, the individual will be transferred to another location where they can be isolated; and
  - ✓ Public health guidance for shelters will be followed when a resident tests positive to minimize the risk to other residents and staff.

**11) What are the City's plans for keeping the community safe when the site opens?**

- This location has 24/7 on-site private security to control the site and, upon the site opening, there will be a sufficient level of on-site security that is coordinated between the Housing, Police and Parks Department (as the same security provider for HHPZ is providing security for this site). All residents must check in with on-site security to access the facility and there is a strict no guest or visitor policy.

**12) Will the surrounding neighborhood receive enhanced services from the City?**

- The City Council directed the Administration to develop plans for coordinated service delivery and to explore the feasibility of enhanced services at these sites. The pandemic is impacting local economies in unprecedented ways, which negatively affects the City's budget situation. The City is currently reviewing and developing its 2020/2021 budget, which will play an important role in determining if enhanced services can and will be provided. Regardless of that outcome, the Administration is committed to ensuring coordinated service delivery at all sites to support community and program success, and limit any potential or perceived impacts. Further, the City will work with the program operator to monitor any increased encampment activity occurring around the site.

**13) What will happen to the site after the public health crisis?**

- The City is committed to ensuring that after the COVID-19 crisis is over, this site will be demobilized within 30 to 60 days. As part of the demobilization process, the trailers will be relocated to another site and the residents will be prioritized for other shelter placements.