

# Council Study Session

November 14, 2022

<b>Agenda Item</b>	Severe Weather Emergency Shelter Next Steps	
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<b>Item Type</b>	Requested by Council <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Update <input type="checkbox"/> Request for Direction <input type="checkbox"/> Presentation <input type="checkbox"/>	

## **SUMMARY**

In recent years the City of Ashland has struggled to provide emergency shelter to vulnerable populations in times of extreme weather. While the City owns and operates a number of City facilities, there is a lack of available City facilities which are suitable to providing emergency shelter during the variety of extreme weather events the City experiences on an annual basis.

One solution to address this issue would be for the City to acquire a location or building which could dependably provide temporary emergency shelter for individuals during extreme weather events that could pose a health hazard to unsheltered individuals, or to individuals whose homes lack heating or cooling. Such a location or facility could also serve as a staging and/or emergency operations center during other types of community emergencies, and as a dedicated location to provide interim shelter and services for the community during a declared disaster or catastrophic event impacting the City.

City staff has identified several general criteria to be considered as part of the site selection process. Site acquisition could include either the purchase of vacant land that could subsequently be developed, or the purchase of a property currently containing a building that could be adapted for one or more of the identified uses.

In order to explore the availability of suitable properties, the City issued a targeted Request for Qualifications in late September to engage a commercial property broker to assist the City in finding a property that met the criteria identified below. The City has not received proposals in response to this request. The City will engage directly with commercial brokers to get direction and resubmit an RFP.

The City has also been looking at ways to more efficiently and effectively stand-up emergency shelters in response to severe weather events. City staff have engaged with a number of non-profit shelter and service providers to determine how best to address this need.

## **POLICIES, PLANS & GOALS SUPPORTED**

N/A

## **PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION**

None

## **BACKGROUND AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

City staff and the City Manager worked together to outline a hierarchy of strategic housing and emergency shelter planning priorities as well as some general criteria that should be considered with regard to selection of a location and potential amenities. These are outlined below:

**Short-Term:** City Staff has been in communication with several non-profit organizations that provide homeless services who might be willing to consider contracting with the City to provide shelter coordination and insurance coverage. Options for Helping Residents of Ashland has indicated that they are willing to take this request to their board for approval. OHRA has been kind enough to agree to develop a rough estimate of costs for such an activity if OHRA were to take on the responsibility of becoming the non-profit sponsor for emergency shelter coordination. The City has supported a shelter coordinator in the past through a contract with a non-profit organization. In 2017 and 2018 the City contracted with OHRA to oversee the winter shelter program which included provisions for emergency shelter services. The Housing and Human Services Commission and City staff are recommending that the City do so again. A contract with a non-profit service provider removes the City from liability for operation of emergency sheltering activities, as the City's insurance policy does not presently cover such activities. Contracting with a non-profit organization to coordinate sheltering activities provides City staff and community partners both continuity and efficiency in the process. This will allow the City to address the issues related to temporary extreme weather which could pose an immediate threat to life.

**Long-Term:** Explore options for properties which might meet the criteria identified below to serve as a permanent location for emergency weather sheltering events and potentially for other emergency needs.

### **Criteria for Emergency Shelter Facility Siting**

Site selection could also include examination of the following types of property:

- City owned surplus properties;
- Non-profit owned properties which could be developed in partnership to consolidate supportive services;
- Developed property currently available for sale;
- Vacant property currently available for sale;
- Select property owners with property not presently listed that could meet the site selection criteria.

There are a number of criteria the City should consider when identifying a site for extreme weather shelter to ensure its dedication of resources is successful at fulfilling the objective of creating a facility that can be flexibly used to best serve the City's long-term needs:

- Site to accommodate priority use – emergency shelter and/or emergency event congregate and supply distribution/management;
- Site location should be near transit, within walking distance to a bus stop (1/4 mile);
- Site location should be near (walking distance) existing retail such as groceries;
- Site should have access to existing City utilities including water, sewer, electric;
- Site should be located outside of natural hazard areas (in floodplain, on/near steep slopes, vulnerable to wildfire or inaccessible in severe weather).

An emergency severe weather shelter, under a new state law adopted by the Oregon Legislature this spring (HB 2006), requires the City of Ashland to approve an application for an emergency shelter regardless of state or local land use laws as long as the application complies with the approval criteria in the new state law. In other words, the City of Ashland can approve an application to develop an emergency shelter if the application complies with the new state law, even if, under other circumstances, the City's land use code would prohibit the emergency shelter at that location. Additional site selection criteria for an Ashland severe weather shelter should include the following.

- Site should be large enough for a building that accommodates sleeping, communal space, and food preparation. The minimum building size should be in the range of 2,000-4,000 square feet.
  - Additionally, the facility may include opportunities for:
    - Storage for personal property;
    - Commercial kitchen to allow for food to be cooked and served on-site;
    - Recreation/exercise areas for children and pets;
    - Potential areas for case management services, including for housing, financial, vocational, educational, or physical or behavioral health care services.
- Site should be able to accommodate a potential minimum 10 pallet structures in a location that can largely be screened from public view for privacy and security of occupants.
- Site should accommodate parking for staff, volunteers, occupants, and potentially some spaces available for individual car camping.
- Site should accommodate intermittent use by vehicles providing services such as portable laundry truck, dental health truck, shower truck (including utility hookups), etc.
- Site and facility should be able to function as a public congregate and supplies distribution center in the potential case this use is required during/following a community emergency event (fire, flood, earthquake, sever weather, etc.); site should be able to accommodate the following access on-site or nearby:
  - multiple emergency service vehicles, including police, fire and EMS vehicles;
  - emergency bus access for transport pick-up, drop-off and for emergency cooling/heating/shelter station service;
  - supply drop-off and/or distribution from commercial delivery and semi-trailer trucks.
- Property zoning which allows for adaptive/flexible use of the building in the event needs change over time.
- Site acquisition should be for an amount that is within the City's budget, to include minimum upgrades needed for operation.
  - An existing building should be usable without a significant remodel, although the addition of a commercial kitchen, accessible restrooms, and the installation of fire suppression systems may be considered.
  - Substantial upgrades, additions, and alterations could be considered as future phases of development utilizing CDBG or AHTF revenue.

## **FISCAL IMPACTS**

The City of Ashland has received a one-time \$1,000,000 grant through the State of Oregon Department of Administrative Services (SB 5561 Grant). These funds have very few restrictions but must be used to support housing and homeless programs and services. In addition to this one-time grant, the City could consider the future appropriation of Community Development Block Grants, Affordable Housing Trust

Funds, and pursuing other grant funds to support the acquisition and development of the proposed facility.

City staff is working to return to the City Council with recommendations for a severe weather shelter service contract at its next regular Business Meeting. Regarding a contract for severe weather shelter services, the fiscal impacts would range based on the City's temperature thresholds and the number of times an emergency shelter is enacted. This activity would require the Council to approve a supplemental budget amendment.

City staff will develop a funding plan for City Council consideration when is reports back on potential long-term emergency shelter options.

**ACTIONS, OPTIONS & POTENTIAL MOTIONS**

None-Information Only

**REFERENCES & ATTACHMENTS**

None