

Agenda Item Report



Winnebago County
The Wave of the Future

DATE: December 27, 2022

FROM: County Executive Jon Doemel and Human Services Director Bill Topel

RE: Ratifying a Proclamation of a County Emergency Due to Extreme Winter Weather and Unplanned Staffing Shortages and Temporary Closing of the Day by Day Warming Shelter

General Description:

Ratifying an emergency proclamation for Winter Storm Elliot and issuing an emergency to assist the Day by Day Warming shelter with staffing and operational support.

Action Requested:

Ratify the emergency proclamation for Winter Storm Elliot and extend the proclamation for the staffing operational shortages at Day by Day Warming Shelter until the earlier of February 28, 2023 or ended by the county executive.

Procedural Steps:

This resolution is coming directly to the county board pursuant to Wisconsin Statutes 323.11 and 323.14(4)b. On December 20, 2022, County Executive Jon Doemel issued an emergency proclamation due to the temporarily closed Day by Day Shelter and the impending storm. The statutes require board action.

Background:

On December 19, the county and city of Oshkosh were notified the Day by Day Warming Shelter located on High Avenue in Oshkosh was planning to close. The shelter did not have the required staff to operate in the evening. At the time, there was the threat of significant snow fall, heavy winds, cold temperatures, and blizzard conditions. There was no way the shelter was going to be able to operate 24/7 to ensure the safety of the shelter's clients and guests.

On December 20, county officials met with city officials to discuss how to prepare for the winter storm. The storm's effects were going to be exacerbated by the lack of an evening shelter. Further, the Christmas holiday was going to close many of the day hour warming locations. The weather also closed some of these warming locations.

On December 20, I issued an emergency proclamation which opened our emergency government plans. We then organized staffing of a 24/7 emergency shelter with county staff paid at a significant pay differential. In about an hour, all four-hour shifts were filled. In addition, the county employed several staff who had once been employed at the shelter.

The city provided two officers for the evening hours. Basic meals were provided by the jail. Renee Soroko, the deputy director of human services, was our incident commander and was able to coordinate a successful shelter with the DHS team.

As the weather event continued, we extended our 24/7 operations through Christmas. DHS staff called on-call backup staff to ensure enough staffing. The 24/7 operation was successful with little incident.

The plan is for the Day by Day Warming Shelter to be closed until January 9, 2023.

Policy Discussion:

State statutes allow the governing body of a local government to declare, through resolution, when the health and safety of people are at risk. We know Wisconsin winters are cold and at times, life threatening. We know there are about 30-40 individuals who sleep in cars or outdoors on a regular basis. Each of those lives are threatened when a shelter is closed or at risk of closing due to staffing.

After approval of this resolution, the county will be able to redeploy staff and use funds to assist in the staffing of the Day by Day Warming Shelter. Our expectation is that Day by Day works with the city, county, and state governments in an inter-agency and inter-department task force to identify a better operational plan for the shelter.

Between now and January 9, 2023, the county will fully operate the shelter. In the meantime, Day by Day will be hiring and training staff. They will also be reviewing operational plans to ensure future success. After January 9, the county will have the ability to redeploy staff to fill shifts as an effort to avoid future staffing shortage closures.

The resolution requires the county executive to consult with the county board chairperson. This ensures the county board is made aware of decisions required to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the population served by the shelter.

The emergency will end on February 28, 2023 unless ended sooner by the county executive. That date is not arbitrary as it is the February meeting of this body. This ensures the county and the shelter have enough time to get through the winter months without the need for an extension.

Fiscal Impact:

At this time a budget transfer is not necessary. The county is reallocating budgeted funds. Some of these funds are available due to staff vacancies in human services. Other funds are available for these types of uses. A better financial analysis will be available at the county board meeting on January 3. This resolution will not result in long-term obligations. All expenses are one-time. Some of the allocated Neighborhood Improvement Fund may be used to fund this emergency. Lastly, state and federal reimbursement through various agencies will be pursued.

Attachments:

Emergency Proclamation
Resolution