



City of Dallas

Winter Weather Operations

City Council Briefing
November 5, 2025

Kevin Oden
Director
Office of Emergency Management &
Crisis Response

Overview



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Purpose



Seek policy direction from the City Council to determine if the City of Dallas should continue to operate centralized regional supporting shelter for inclement weather or move to a scalable, place-based model.



Purpose (cont.)



While the program is designed for Dallas residents, the scale of our operations, 1,300 or more individuals at Fair Park and Austin Street Center, has effectively positioned Dallas as the regional sheltering hub during emergency winter weather events.

While this model ensures life safety for hundreds, it creates three conditions:

1. Fiscal Overreach:

- FY 2024 allocation: \$0.9 million
- FY 2024 actual cost: \$2.9 million

2. Operational Strain:

- Significant resource drain on Police, Fire, EMCR, Parks, and Service Providers.
- Each activation diverts hundreds of staff hours from normal operations for set-up, security, and clean-up.
- Activation and closure require coordinated, multi-day logistics resembling a full emergency deployment.

3. Facility & Strategic Conflict:

- Fair Park is a revenue-generating asset and is scheduled for major renovations and long-term redevelopment.
- Continuing this use directly competes with the City's investment goals and community event programming.
- Large-scale congregation near downtown complicates public safety management and neighborhood relations.



Background & History



- **May 2019:** City Council direction to create Inclement Weather Shelter (IWS) program in Chapter 51A.
- **November 2019:** First IWS (11/11-16) at Dallas Convention Center. 300 guests, managed fully by City at cost of \$177,000.
- **December 2019:** Housing & Homelessness Solutions (HHS) Committee Briefed on IWS Single Site Plan (\$200,000 budget)
- **January 2020:** HHS Committee Briefing Update on Chapter 45 & 51A and Future IWS Considerations.
- **Winter 2020-2022:** Hotel sheltering due to COVID 19. Convention Center use during Winter Storm Uri (2021). Total cost \$3.4M (General & Coronavirus Federal Funds)
- **December 2022:** HHS Briefing IWS Operations: Fair Park site & Austin Street Center.
- **Winter 2023-2024:** Activation of Fair Park as primary location and Austin Street as overflow. 1,314 peak clients served at a total cost of \$2.9M. Budgeted amount: \$978,000.



Background & History



Current City Policy – Inclement Weather Sheltering (Dallas City Code Ch. 45):

Establishes basic safety and permitting standards for *non-City* entities that wish to open temporary shelters during inclement weather (cold or heat).

City Role:

- The Temporary Inclement Weather Shelter Coordinator reviews, issues, and enforces permits.
- **The ordinance does not obligate the City to operate, fund, or staff shelters.**

Operator Duties:

- Must apply for a Temporary Inclement Weather Shelter Permit valid for two years.
- Must submit floor plans and an operations plan covering staffing, infection control, and accessibility.
- Must pay all City costs tied to operations (e.g., fire watch, police security).

Impact: 1 permitted partner provided 80 beds for two nights in January 2025.



Background & History



January 2025 Activations*:

Two activation periods (Jan 5–13 and Jan 18–24):

- **Total shelter stays:** 4,167 individuals (2,318 + 1,849).
- Represents more than *the entire reported unsheltered population of Dallas* Fair Park served as the primary “mega-site”, operated by Austin Street Center.

Supportive service outcomes:

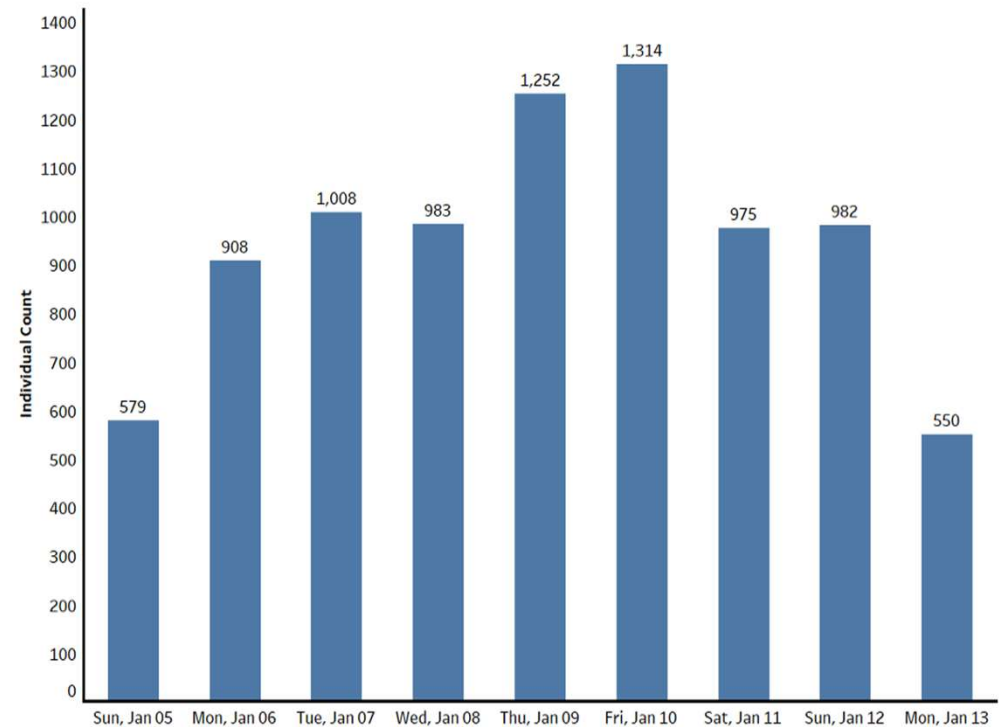
- **150 shelter placements** (3.6% of total stays).
- **37 diversions** from homelessness (0.9%).
- **56 families** placed in hotels.
- No data provided on housing exits or long-term stabilization.

Transportation operations:

- **220 311 requests, 225 people located, 92 transported, 125 refused** — a heavy coordination effort citywide.

Staffing and partner load: DFR, DPD, Parks, TPW, 311, Animal Services, OHS, PKR, multiple NGOs — essentially a full-city activation for almost two weeks.

Temporary Inclement Weather Shelter Statistics



[*https://dallascityhall.com/government/citymanager/Documents/FY24-25%20Memos/OHS-%20Temporary%20Weather.pdf](https://dallascityhall.com/government/citymanager/Documents/FY24-25%20Memos/OHS-%20Temporary%20Weather.pdf)

Goals and Objectives



Create strategic alignment with Council's investments and priorities:

- **Rehousing Initiatives:** reducing the unsheltered population by connecting individuals to permanent housing solutions
- **Dallas Street Response:** addressing chronic encampments proactively.
- **Regional Coordination:** encouraging other North Texas cities to activate local capacity.
- **Asset Stewardship:** preserves Fair Park's revenue potential and availability for development.
- **Fiscal Responsibility:** Provide service within the budget approved by the City Council.



Benchmarking with Peer Cities



Category	Houston	Austin	Fort Worth	San Antonio	Dallas
Unsheltered PIT Count	1282	1577	967	888	1067
Winter Weather Shelter Model	Decentralized network of 8 City shelters & NGO warming centers	Centralized intake with surge shelters	Centralized intake via City-contracted NGO	Decentralized model using resilience hubs* & partner shelters	Centralized, regional serving shelter model
Peak Guests	~800 persons	300 persons	140 persons	465 persons	1314 persons
Total Capacity	1000 persons	500 persons	300 persons	500 persons	1300 persons
Family Overflow	Salvation Army Placement	Hotel Vouchers	Salvation Army Placement	Family Shelters	Family Gateway (at own expense)
Est. Costs	\$6,500,000	\$345,000	\$200,000	\$500,000	\$2,900,000
Key Challenges	Cost & Disruption to City facilities	Demand at centralized location	Limited capacity vs. Regional need	Funding & demand from regional cities	Funding, demand from regional cities, space availability

***Resilience Hubs** in San Antonio are city-owned community or senior centers that the city temporarily repurposes during weather emergencies. They are not overnight shelters — they function as overnight warming centers.



Benchmarking Analysis



- **Cost control vs. mega activations:** Houston's January 2025 freeze alone cost \$6.5M. Dallas saw \$2.9M last winter; staying "regional" keeps us on that cost curve.
- **Central intake without mega-site:** Austin runs a single intake and contracts shelter beds, then scales with city facilities and allocates \$345k for operations.
- **Event-based, distributed facilities:** San Antonio uses resilience hubs that open overnight only when needed not as standing mega shelters plus partner NGOs for added capacity.
- **Right-size services:** Fort Worth activates overflow only when regular shelter beds are full, with city-contracted NGO operations, transit shuttles, and end-of-night tear-down
- **Need vs. surge:** Houston's unsheltered 1,282 (2025 PIT) shows demand can capacity if a single city becomes the regional default. Our data show Dallas is already absorbing that dynamic during freezes.



Framing Benchmarking and Experience



Observation	Evidence (Jan 2025)	Implication
High Demand	4,167 shelter stays in two activations	Dallas has become the region's default provider.
Low Exits	Only 187 combined shelter/diversion outcomes (4.5%)	>95% return to unsheltered status after the event; minimal long-term impact. Regional model adds to total number of unsheltered in Dallas post-event.
Massive Resource Use	Multi-department activation + Fair Park operation	Significant personnel/overtime costs with limited measurable outcomes.
No Permanent Exit Pathways	No housing placement data reported	Program protects people for a week but resets the next freeze.
Facility Conflict	Fair Park used for emergency sheltering	Disrupts revenue programming and upcoming renovations.



Proposed Direction



Transition from a **regional mega-site** model to a **life-safety model** that protects Dallas residents, reduces operational disruption, and aligns with Council approved homelessness reduction strategies.

Component	Description
Primary Cold Weather Site (300 beds)	Utilize the former Austin Street Center facility (currently inactive but service-ready) under contract as the central overflow location. City-funded, staffed through contract.
Supplemental Park & Recreation Sites (up to 6)	Activate unpublished, geographically dispersed recreation centers (100 persons each) that have back-up generators installed. Mirrors San Antonio Resilience Center Model.
Activation Conditions	When temperatures are forecasted to fall below 36°F in wet conditions or 32°F in dry conditions overnight for four or more consecutive hours; OR For any reason determined by the Director of EMCR in which activation of sheltering operations would benefit the health, life safety, or quality of life of people or an area.
Capacity	900 total spaces citywide scalable without single site congregation.
Cost	Estimated annual operating cost \$1.2M, consistent with current budget appropriation.
Community Impact	Reduces concentration of single large site; leverages existing city assets without compromising Fair Park or requiring full emergency staffing surges. Reduces demand for Dallas to serve as regional shelter.



Considerations



Decision Point	If Dallas stays “Regional mega-site”:	If Dallas pivots:
Operating Model	Keep 1,300+ Fair Park mega-site, heavy city staffing	300 contracted beds at Austin Street (old bldg) + up to 6 unpublished Park & Rec sites (100 each)
Estimated Cost	Continued significant cost overruns	Remains within \$1.2M appropriation by limiting scale and duration
City Forces Strain	Large deployments (DPD/DFR/OEM/PKR) every activation	Smaller, distributed posts; shorter set-up/tear-down cycles
Community Impact	Congestion near downtown; complex closures as noted in recent audit report	De-concentrated; less visible impact and simpler closure
City Asset Management	Conflicts with revenue generating events and construction windows	Preserves Fair Park for revenue & redevelopment



Recommendations



- 1. Support the model shift:** Adopt the recommended place-based service model
 - 300 contracted beds at the Austin Street Center.
 - Up to six unpublished Park & Recreation sites (100 each) for overnight surge, opened only on activation nights.
- 2. Affirm budget intent:** Operate within the \$1.2M allocation, avoiding mega-site cost overruns
- 3. Adopt a collaborative regional stance:** Support staff in formalizing a regional cold-weather strategy so Dallas is not the regional shelter.
- 4. Support operational guardrails:**
 - Keep existing activation triggers; overnight only; no day-time congregation at PKR sites.
 - Unpublished surge sites filled using city and partner transportation resources only with a focus on life safety, not service hubs.
 - Rapid set up and demobilization after each event
 - Strategic alignment: Recognize the shift to Council investments and reported 28% reduction in unsheltered homelessness, fewer unsheltered people means fewer beds needed during inclement weather activation.



Timeline & Next Steps



- **Immediate:**
 - Incorporate feedback from the City Council.
 - Finalize FY 2025–2026 Emergency Winter Weather Shelter Strategy and implementation plan.
 - Continue coordination with partner agencies and providers.
- **December 3, 2025**
 - **Council Action:** Approve Agreement with Austin Street Center for 300 contracted beds.
- **On-Going**
 - Collaboration with partners to identify and prepare up to six recreation centers for emergency activation.
 - Develop communications and transportation plans to ensure smooth transition from Fair Park model.





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