

OCTOBER 20, 2020

A Workshop Meeting of the Board of Lee County Commissioners, sitting as the Management & Planning Committee, was held on this date with the following Commissioners present:

Brian Hamman, Chairman  
 Franklin B. Mann, Vice-Chairman  
 Cecil Pendergrass  
 John E. Manning  
 Ray Sandelli

Chairman Hamman called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m., welcomed everyone, and introduced guests, Lee County Sheriff (LCSO) Carmine Marceno and Captain Andrew Prisco, LCSO Community Response Unit, and asked Sheriff Marceno to comment on what the LCSO encounters each and every day on the streets of Lee County concerning the homelessness situation.

### **Lee County Sheriff**

Lee County Sheriff Carmine Marceno thanked the Board, County Manager Roger Desjarlais and staff for the invitation to participate in today's discussion. He expressed gratitude to the residents of Lee County who are always ready and willing to help, and to LCSO staff for all they do every day, 24-7. He described 5 Hot Teams strategically placed throughout the County, made up of a crisis-intervention trained (CIT) deputy, a mental health professional, and a civilian trained to forge through the ins and outs of the programs and offerings of the many plans Lee County has in place for citizens. The Hot Teams' primary efforts are building trust and establishing a rapport with those in need of assistance. Sheriff Marceno expressed gratitude for the County's willingness to join forces and collaborate on finding workable solutions for the Homeless while maintaining a focus on the health, safety and well-being of all citizens, with special gratitude to Director of Human and Veterans Services Roger Mercado for his tireless assistance in every aspect of helping the homeless.

### **Lee County Manager**

Lee County Manager Roger Desjarlais welcomed Sheriff Marceno and thanked him for his attendance today and for the excellent relations he has helped to create between Lee County and the LCSO. He remarked this is the first time he recalls ever having the benefit of such a liaison involving finding workable solutions that are in the best interests of all citizens.

## **PRESENTATION AND INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION**

**Topic:** Homelessness - Lee County

**Presented by:** Assistant County Manager Marc Mora

Assistant County Manager Marc Mora narrated a comprehensive PowerPoint presentation, and led an interactive discussion on *Homelessness: Lee County*. He began the presentation with an overview of today's agenda and noted there would be follow-up "guiding questions" requesting the Board's direction as to whether to continue with current activities and initiatives, and/or consider additional goals and objectives. He reported the County's annual investment for homelessness in FY2019-2020 of \$11,369,708, derived from Federal Grant Funds, State Grant Funds and the County's General Fund. Earlier this year after the Board of County Commissioners issued a directive to staff for emphasis on services for the homeless staff responded with the following initiatives, detailed by Mr. Mora:

- Housing, Outreach & Treatment (HOT) Teams with the Sheriff's Office (LCSO)
- Day Center (basic needs) with the Salvation Army-Homeless Resources Center on Edison Avenue
- Increased Housing with Partners Community Assisted & Supported Living, Inc. on Colonial Boulevard
- Enhanced use of HMIS, a web-based application used by providers to coordinate care, manage, operations and better serve clients
- Review and/revise the ordinance prohibiting panhandling in rights-of-way (if needed) for safety of both the homeless and vehicle traffic.

Mr. Mora and County Manager Desjarlais responded to comments and questions by the Board throughout the discussion and addressed a situation described by Commissioner Mann voicing his frustration and concern about panhandlers positioning themselves at major county intersections, soliciting money, food, work, usually claiming hunger/homelessness. Sheriff Marceno pointed out that if they are positioned on a county right-of-way for the purpose of soliciting it is in violation of both the county ordinance and Florida Laws. The Sheriff elaborated, pointing out that arresting any person in these situations is the last option of the deputies and they make every attempt to determine the best way to assist by getting them off the streets and to wherever they need to be. The Sheriff reiterated that incarceration would result only as a final option after all other options failed. County Attorney Richard Wm. Wesch advised that if the Board concurred, he would review the ordinance in

place at this time noting it to be quite old and may need updating or modifications for the purpose of reconciliation with state law and brought back for Board consideration. Mr. Mora defined *Continuum of Care* as the local planning body and coordinator of housing and services funding, functioning similar to an umbrella under which the Lee County Homeless Coalition and Lee County Human & Veterans Services are Split Lead Agencies, with businesses, advocates, stockholders, partners, including the municipalities, law enforcement, non-profit Homeless Service Providers, and the Board of County Commissioners for direction of federal, state and county funding. Mr. Mora presented an overview of the Homeless population to date, indicating current population information and an overall annual estimate of homeless people currently at 2,714. He reviewed a recent Homeless Impact Survey-Density map and Homeless Population location maps indicating the presence of known homeless camps (date: 09/20/2020) and actual on-site photographs of area homeless encampments. Captain Andrew Prisco, LCSO Community Response Unit, described Crisis Intervention Team Training and the Re-Entry Committee that consists of a partnership between the Public Defender and LCSO working with three re-entry specialists at the jail, including resources for persons exiting jail who were homeless at entry, and coordination of housing and services for high-service needs and high utilizers of jail, hospital and homeless services. In his overview of Crisis Intervention Team Training Capt. Prisco apprised that the deputies make every attempt to establish trust in their interactions with anyone in crisis situations, and also described the success and efficacy of the Mental Health Wing at the Jail, implemented by Sheriff Marceno.

Mr. Mora focused the discussion toward Current Initiatives, Future Initiatives and Intended Outcomes, and there was a lengthy discussion with regard to the complexities of achieving all that is involved in providing the pathways to permanent housing for homelessness. Commissioner Pendergrass stressed that under no circumstances does this discussion reflect any intention of the Board to build houses. County Manager Desjarlais also emphasized that the programs discussed today are not intended to be permanent housing. He indicated if the County is going to invest additional funds, the ultimate goal has to be clearly defined and that will be the goal of the next meeting. Sheriff Marceno indicated that LCSO will work on obtaining real statistical data to bring to the next meeting, and in a brief discussion about the soon-to-expire Eviction Moratorium, stated we can be proactive and make certain that those people who will be impacted know that the County has programs and resources to assist them. Commissioner Hamman suggested a card that can connect them to all that is available with contact information to which Mr. Mora informed they have a "Wrap Card" specifically for that purpose.

County Manager Desjarlais thanked the Sheriff and the Board for today's conversations, remarking that our partnership with the Sheriff is an invaluable liaison. Lee County will continue to work with all nonprofits and the municipalities to increase coordination toward the current initiatives, adding that avoiding crisis is a primary goal. At Commissioner Hamman's request, Sheriff Marceno pointed out the best way for citizens to report Panhandling.

The Chairman adjourned the meeting at 3:20 p.m.

ATTEST:  
LINDA DOGGETT, CLERK

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Deputy Clerk

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Chairman, Lee County Commission