

SARASOTA COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Emergency Services

TO: Sarasota County Commission
THROUGH: Jonathan R. Lewis, County Administrator
FROM: Richard A. Collins, Director, Emergency Services
DATE: March 21, 2018
SUBJECT: **Hurricane Irma Sheltering Operations**

RECOMMENDED MOTION(S) OR ACTION(S):

Update on sheltering operations.

BACKGROUND:

On September 10, 2017, Hurricane Irma made landfall on the Southwest Florida coast as a major hurricane and subsequently moved north up the Florida peninsula, impacting over 50 counties. Sarasota County sustained impacts consistent with a strong tropical storm to minimal Category 1 hurricane, including loss of electrical utilities to almost 220,000 customers, as well as impacts to various critical facilities, residential structures, traffic signals, and vegetative debris.

The County planning effort for Hurricane Irma began as early as Monday, September 4, 2017, as the hurricane formed in the Atlantic Ocean. Throughout the week, up to landfall, the track and intensity remained fluid, resulting in a potential track and impact to Sarasota County as a Category 4 major hurricane. Sarasota County Government implemented its Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) and initiated protective actions to prepare the community for a major hurricane. This included regular communication with all municipal partners, constitutional partners, and community stakeholders. A Declaration of a State of Emergency was initiated, along with sheltering over 20,000 residents in advance of the storm.

The County began sheltering operations as early as Thursday, September 7, 2017 to support evacuees from other parts of the State. Ultimately, 10 general population shelters were opened supporting over 19,000 citizens from Sarasota County, Charlotte County, and others. The County initially opened two special needs shelters for medically dependent citizens, and as the forecast shifted the track of Hurricane Irma, Charlotte County made the request to transfer their special needs operations to Sarasota County based upon potential storm surge. In total, the three special needs shelters supported an additional 1,600 citizens.

Although not the potential Category 4 hurricane expected to impact Sarasota County, Hurricane Irma created the need to implement protective actions consistent with a major hurricane. Given the extensive effort taken to prepare the community for this hurricane, it is important to capture best practices, lessons learned and opportunities for improvement from across the organization.

In November 2017, Emergency Services began collaborating with all county departments and community partners to ensure a thorough review of all processes. The Gulf Coast Community Foundation and the Barancik Foundation partnered with the County to complete an in-depth After

Action Review. Peer reviewers including Craig Fugate, former FEMA Director; Jonathan Lord, Florida Division of Emergency Management; Alan Harris, Emergency Management Director for Seminole County; and Manny Soto, Emergency Management Director for the City of Orlando, assisted in reviewing the actions to Hurricane Irma. Additionally, Emergency Response Educators and Consultants (EREC) were brought in through State grant funding to facilitate meetings and produce the After Action Report.

Since November 2017, and in the months following, the County has held over 23 meetings with more than 350 stakeholders, including elected officials, local municipalities, Sarasota County Schools, area hospitals, nonprofits and the business community, to gather their input. The final After Action Report prepared by EREC was delivered to the Board of County Commissioners by Craig Fugate on March 14, 2018. The report identified recommendations to enhance the County's emergency plans for future disasters including several areas such as planning, mass care services, and operational coordination.

Within the area of Mass Care, the review team identified potential efficiencies that should be explored between Sarasota and Charlotte County to enhance future sheltering operations. During Hurricane Irma, shelters in the southern areas of the County reported a 2:1 ratio of Charlotte county residents seeking shelter. Additionally, while the move of the special needs shelter from Charlotte to Sarasota County was successful, it stressed the operational tempo based upon timing of the request. The After Action Report provides two recommendations in this area including:

Recommendation 8.7.1: Develop a Memorandum of Understanding/Memorandum of Agreement (MOU/MOA) with Charlotte County for housing their residents and medically-dependent individuals in Sarasota County shelters.

Recommendation 8.7.2: Develop a Memorandum of Understanding/Memorandum of Agreement (MOU/MOA) with Charlotte County for support from Charlotte County School District staff and County personnel along with law enforcement for security and fire rescue for emergency medical services.

Based upon the limited sheltering capability within Charlotte County, due to topography and susceptibility of extensive surge requiring Charlotte County citizens to seek shelter in Sarasota County, staff believes there is an opportunity to explore these recommendations for implementation. Working with Charlotte County in support of these operations would provide a force multiplier enhancing shelter operations during a disaster. Additionally, identifying a plan for movement of the special needs operations earlier in the timeline for an approaching storm, if needed, would reduce stress in the special needs operations and ensure seamless operations between the two counties during critical phases of the operations.

Moving forward, staff will request to meet with the Charlotte County Emergency Management team, School District, Health Department, and various supporting agencies to consider and develop appropriate plans, MOU/MOAs, and training to implement these recommendations.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. PowerPoint Presentation