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March 22, 2021

County Judge Hidalgo and Commissioner Ellis, Garcia, Ramsey, and Cagle

AGENDA LETTER

Please consider the following item on the Commissioners Court Agenda for March 30, 2021.

On March 9, 2021, Commissioners Court directed the Harris County Community Services Department to work with relevant departments, precinct offices, and local community based organizations to create a plan to support residents in applying for FEMA Individual Assistance (IA) and to provide repair and recovery resources for low income county residents facing damage because of Winter Storm Uri. Pursuant to that request, transmitted herewith for the Court's consideration for approval is Winter Storm Uri Recovery Plan Proposal.

Thank you for your assistance with this request.

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Executive Director

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HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Adrienne M. Holloway, Ph.D. Executive Director

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To: Judge Hidalgo, Commissioner Ellis, Commissioner Garcia, Commissioner Ramsey, Commissioner

Cagle

From: Adrienne M. Holloway, Ph.D., Executive Director, Community Services Department

RE: Winter Storm Uri Resident Assistance in Recovery & Repair

On March 9, 2021, Commissioners Court directed the Harris County Community Services Department to work with relevant departments, precinct offices, and local community based organizations to create a plan to support residents in applying for FEMA Individual Assistance (IA) and to provide repair and recovery resources for low income county residents facing damage because of Winter Storm Uri. Pursuant to that request, transmitted herewith for the Court's consideration for approval is Winter Storm Uri Recovery Plan Proposal. Note that the following proposal was informed by conversations with Harris County precincts', Public Health, Library and Homeland Security and Emergency Management department staff as well as with staff from the Greater Houston Community Foundation, United Way, LISC, and Connective. Further, the strategies proposed below, while within the context of Storm Uri activation, is designed to be appropriately activated in response to myriad local disasters and crises.

Executive Summary

On February 19, 2021, President Joseph Biden approved a major disaster declaration for several Texas counties, inclusive of Harris County. With the declaration comes federal assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) which includes grants for temporary housing and home repairs, low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses and other programs to help individuals and business owners recover from the effects of the disaster. To apply for assistance, individuals need to complete an online questionnaire or call a toll-free number. In previous significant disasters, FEMA established local recovery centers, equipped with technology and staff to assist individuals in applying for assistance. For Storm Uri, FEMA did not activate such centers.

As of March 18th, FEMA has 121,843 Storm Uri registrations (March 18th FEMA Dashboard), of which 68,234 are renters and 53,557 are homeowners. Data also revealed that 69% of Harris County applicants are without homeowners insurance vis-à-vis 31% that have homeowners insurance, thus creating a significant financial burden particularly on low income households without the resources to pay for immediate plumbing repairs, or pay for an insurance deductible that is not a FEMA reimbursable expense.

Based on a review of the FEMA Individual Assistance and Housing Assistance data from March 18th, (note there exists a lag with the FEMA Dashboard's 121,843 data) the Housing Assistance Referrals and

Housing Eligible registrations reflect a very low Eligibility rate of 12%, and a housing repair average of \$2,994.83 (refer to FEMA tables below).

REGISTRATIONS					
	121,843 Registrations				
53,557 Owners	68,234 Renters	52 Unknown			



Disaster: 4586

Disaster: 4586								
County	Regi	istrations	Val Reg	id gistrations	Inspections Issued	HA Referrals	HA Eligible	HA Amount
Harris (County)	1	19,994		119,761	19,175	77,684	9,382	\$30,317,361.32
HA Avg \$		HA Eligibili Rate	ty	Repair Paid	Repair Amount	Repair Av	g \$	
\$3,23	31.44	12.0	8%	1,894	\$5,672,202.21	\$2,99	4.83	

Further, preliminary data from Houston water customer analyses, projected out to unincorporated Harris County, suggests that, at least, 55,000 homes experienced some type of pipe damage which interrupted water flow.

CSD proposes to leverage its community involvement and investment experience to address the unique characteristics Storm Uri brought to Harris County: extreme winter weather, within a 1.5-year long pandemic, and amidst strained financial, community and personal resources. Thus, the overarching framework of our proposed work is one of communication, coordination, and cooperation with our internal and external partners and with our residents.

Specific to the charge given by Commissioner's Court:

To ensure that all potentially eligible residents have the capability to submit a FEMA application for assistance, we present the following options:

- Increase and diversify messaging and promotion vehicles
- Stand up (additional) neighborhood Disaster Assistance Centers and Pop-Up Centers

To address long term recovery, we present the following option:

• Resiliency Assessment

To address unmet home repair needs of residents that were either denied of FEMA assistance, did not meet application deadline, did not receive more than limited emergency repairs from other

sources, we request addition time to consult with our peers and stakeholders and analyze additional forthcoming data to develop proposals for the following options:

- CSD Emergency Home Repair Program
- Landlord Small Property Emergency Repair Program

Problem Statement-FEMA Application Submission

Recognizing the challenge completing an online application may pose on many of our community residents, CSD, in consultation with precinct staff, developed and delivered a training to inform staff how to assist residents in completing the FEMA application. Over 200 precinct and county staff participated in the training. Subsequently, precinct staff stood up "Disaster Assistance Centers" (DAC) within their respective jurisdiction offering assistance to residents and providing access to Wi-Fi and technology for those who may not need application assistance. Further, CSD staff, when available, colocate at precinct DACs to provide expert guidance when needed.

Despite these efforts, we expect that many individuals still have not completed a FEMA assistance application. Barriers to application completion that have been identified include:

- Lack of Awareness
- Lack of Trust (in government)
- Lack of Access to DAC

Following are strategic approaches addressing each barrier.

Lack of Awareness-Messaging

Residents may be unfamiliar with the role to which FEMA assumes in the Winter Storm URI recovery efforts. Further, individuals familiar with FEMA's response to hurricane disasters may be waiting for announcements of FEMA assistance centers. Finally, residents may not recognize that the online application/call number (and its deadline) is the only mechanism in place to request assistance. Thus, it is imperative to create a communication campaign that is simple to execute, include appropriate messaging and delivered via diverse channels. A CSD launched campaign will include:

- Consistent, solution-based messaging
- Tailored messaging to connect with desired targeted populations targeted (language, mobility, and other barriers)
- Diverse distribution channel deployment
 - Canvassing-Canvassing teams should be deployed in areas with high probability of housing damage with low to no resources to correct damage. These include areas with aged housing, high poverty, and high social vulnerability.
 - Media-Distribute messages via several local news media and press releases
 - Print Collateral-Develop and share media materials such as flyers, posters, door hangars that can be disseminated during canvassing and via email blasts
 - Social Media/Leverage Social Media Influencers-Leverage key resources by using social media influencers to share message on their social media platforms. This includes our government partners and partner agencies.

- Host regular online Facebook/Instagram/Twitter discussion with live Q&As, town halls and knowledge sharing. A hashtag will be created to help people find locate and share these conversations.
- Post daily on our Social Media platforms.
- Use social Networks such as "Nextdoor" can quickly deploy the message by neighborhood.
- Target community leaders, practitioners and professionals by posting to LinkedIn relevant information, links, and videos.
- Message Training Deliver training to ensure that all partners, staff, and leadership understand specific messaging and methods to correct deploy them.

Lack of Trust-Address Concerns

It is understood, if not expected, that residents may feel discouraged to approach government entities for relief based on previous experiences. Further, many of our communities may be hesitant to engage with federal government entities due to concern of unwanted information sharing. To address issues of distrust, CSD will partner with community agencies to encourage FEMA application engagement by,

- Implementing small outreach/information sharing events that include the disseminating of information designed to overcoming negative opinions held by public surrounding FEMA and disaster relief efforts.
- Utilize call center/phone call practices to follow up with identified residents (CSD and community partners) in an effort to minimize fear held by vulnerable populations or those who have experienced inequitable treatment. These populations include:
 - Hispanic The heaviest concentrations of Hispanic and/or Latino communities are in the northwestern and southeastern sections of Harris County.
 - African American The Black/African American population is largely located in northeastern and southeastern areas of Harris County, with a few concentrations in the northwest.
 - Asian Harris County's Asian population is mostly concentrated in the southwest area of Harris County, with a few pockets in the northwest and in the southeast toward Galveston.
 - Seniors About 11% of Harris County's population is 65 years or older, per the most recent
 U.S. Census Bureau statistics. In absolute numbers, this is about 514,000 people.
 - Person with disabilities Community tabulation areas in Harris County with the highest percentages of persons with disabilities are located largely in the eastern half of the county, with a concentration northeast of downtown Houston, in the southeast around the 610 loop, and then in a few outlying areas along the perimeter of the county.
 - Messaging should consider those with limited English proficiency, disability, or other communication barriers.

Lack of Access to DAC

To address mobility issues and/or discomfort with traveling to local DACs, CSD can facilitate bringing services closer to home. Further, to continue the access to recovery resources, CSD Resource Navigators will establish and maintain specific communication processes for residents and stakeholders to utilize.

Launch Pop-up and Mobile Disaster Recovery Centers – Services are provided to populations that
might not otherwise have access to technical assistance, technology or Wi-Fi by staffing mobile and

pop up recovery centers with Resource Navigators who have been trained in providing resources regarding applying for FEMA and addressing other unmet needs. Partners include:

- Harris County Precincts Disaster Recovery Centers
 - Continue to train precinct staff standing up DAC's and augment staff with Resource Navigators when needed.
- Harris County Public Health Mobile Pop-Up
 - Deploy VR mobile unit to targeted neighborhoods to serve as a mobile DAC and offer onsite access to technology, Wi-Fi and technical assistance offered by CSD Resource Navigators.
- Harris County Public Library Pop-Up DACs
 - Activate targeted libraries as Pop-Up DACs. Library staff received FEMA Application Training from CSD. CSD Resource Navigators will augment library staff when necessary.
- Resource Navigators can also assist pop up center staff by,
 - Answering questions, via an "expert-on- call" system for the residents and DAC staff as they navigate through the FEMA application and the longer, recovery process.
 - Scheduling appointments for residents to meet with staff at DACs.
 - Have readily available answers to frequently asked questions available on its dedicated recovery website

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Note: Many of these strategies will be modified at the culmination of the FEMA application process by transitioning to the sharing and connecting of residents to other local relief efforts.

Problem Statement-Resiliency Assessment

Needs assessment is the foundation for any disaster response and recovery program and is a continuous process to monitor changing needs of survivors throughout the recovery process, as well as can be used to identify gaps and lags in recovery services for both the short and long-term. The completion of a comprehensive resiliency assessment, inclusive of a needs assessment, is critical to ensuring the effective recovery and improved resiliency in the aftermath of Winter Storm Uri, as well as to ensure that vulnerable housing stock is improved to withstand future disasters, and vulnerable residents are further protected against the impacts of such disasters.

Data Collection & Coordination

The Resiliency Assessment is based on the collection of critical data on the storm event and involves the examination of both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data includes FEMA data, damage assessment records and reports, and demographic and vulnerability data to determine at—risk areas. Qualitative data includes information from individual social indicators and contacts with the community.

It is critical that recovery partners coordinate data resources to identify gaps in service. The below actions provide the strategy to coordinate, collect and maintain regular communication on data collection and analysis:

- Convene data committee of representatives of key data sources and meet regularly.
- Complete data sharing agreements that are generic and not event (disaster) specific.
- Collect and maintain data in a central location for use by the data committee.
- Engage third party expertise (consultant, university, etc.) to analyze data and provide key observations from the data to the data committee and service providers.
- Share data analyses on regular basis with key stakeholders.

Deployment of Resources

Resources and services to the community should be deployed based on analyses of damage data and unmet needs. Resource deployment should occur in the context of meeting short term emergency needs, and planning for long-term resiliency improvements to fortify housing and prepare residents for future impacts of similar storms. As resources are limited for Winter Storm Uri, the short-term deployment strategy will focus on meeting emergency needs based on the geographic concentrations of need, age and income of residents who are both uninsured, and still have unmet needs as a result of Winter Storm Uri.

Barriers

Barriers to implementing a resiliency assessment may include but not be limited to the following:

- Lack of good data, or fear from community members to share needs.
- Delays to or lack of data sharing agreements.
- Inability of partner agencies to dedicate staff to support a data committee.
- Funding to engage a consultant to support data analysis including mapping.

Budget

Required Staff/ Asset	Number	Purpose	Proposed Cost
CSD Staff	2-4	Data Committee, Coordination of Resources	N/A, In-Kind
Partner Agency Support (see list in Partners section below)	12	Data Committee, Coordination of Resources	N/A, In-Kind
Consultant Services (90 days)	1	Data Analysis, Mapping, Expert Advisory	\$50K

Problem Statement-Home/Property Repair

Winter Storm Uri exposed significant housing integrity and sustainability challenges for Harris County, where single digits temperatures resulted in countywide failures in water pipes in single family homes and in our rental housing stock. These failures were due to the age of water pipes in structures such as cast iron that rusts and prone to fractures, and PVC pipes under homes with pier and beam, in attics, and walls without the necessary insulation to withstand prolonged temperatures that hadn't been seen

in Houston in decades, and made more critical with rolling twenty four hour plus periods of electricity power outages.

In response to the disaster event, the Harris County and the City of Houston launched in partnership with the Greater Houston Community Foundation (GHCF) and the United Way of Houston a \$15M Houston Harris County Winter Storm Relief Fund, supporting 49 nonprofit partners. The Fund has allocated up to \$6,000 per home to fund Tier 1 critical repairs (muck & gut/removal of damaged interior building materials; proper preventative dry-out & water-extraction of leak affected area; plumbing repairs; achieve running water w/ no leaks; replace essential fixtures (kitchen sink, toilet, shower/tub, hot water heater) if necessary; interior water service only; insulation of new pipes) through grantee non-profits. An additional Tier 2 fund will provide select homeowners with additional repair assistance (repair/replacement of damaged interior building materials [drywall, insulation, flooring] cabinet/countertop replacement (if damaged beyond repair); plumbing fixture replacement [if applicable beyond Tier 1 repairs]; any additional pipe insulation) up to \$6,000 per home. However, this will only assist a projected 1,200 families, and no rental housing developments are eligible. This has been identified as a significant unmet. Consequently, the need for critical repairs in the County associated with Storm Uri go well beyond this philanthropic effort and requires a larger and concerted Harris County response.

Recent discussions with leadership from the GHCF identified opportunities for Harris County to leverage County local funds with the current repair efforts of the Fund's grantees that have the organizational capacity to undertake and perform repairs above and beyond the current potential \$12,000 per home that the Fund would award for Tier 1 and 2 home repairs. Conservatively, several thousand homes fall in the category of critical repairs based on FEMA data showing approximately 2,700 registrants assessed with unmet need as of 3/19/21.

Furthermore, a two-pronged strategy is needed to identify additional homes that need critical repairs in a Tier 2 and beyond scenario. An opportunity to fund a Strike Team is also envisioned as enlisting regional or national repair groups, a combination of nonprofits and for profits, that could be mobilized to scale-up critical repairs in the County. The CSD has the organizational capacity to manage repairs in multiple program delivery roles: awards to entities, and oversight of grant awardees, and direct contractors and the procurement of construction management services to manage grant awardees. The GHCF also indicated that current Fund awardees would perform better with the use of local government funds rather than federal funds, since some entities are not as organizationally proficient with federal funds requirements. Post productive conversations with our stakeholders, additional time is requested to develop a comprehensive and effective program for consideration based on the variables discussed above.

Finally, CSD along with its partner stakeholders recognize the plight experienced by low-income renters who are subjected to unrepaired units due to the limited financial ability of landlords to cover repair costs. There is an interest in developing a program that targets small landlords (30 or less units) that provide housing to very low to low income renters. More data is required to design an appropriate proposal that will consider the target audience, program cost and partnership opportunities.

CSD Activation Recommendation

After extensive dialogue with staff, department peers and community stakeholders, CSD recommends the following actions:

Authorize CSD to execute a 3-month comprehensive communication and outreach strategy to connect residents to FEMA assistance and long-term recovery resources. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Developing and disseminating message collateral
- Activating canvassing teams
- Standing up additional Disaster Recovery Centers

Proposed budget: \$33,763.50

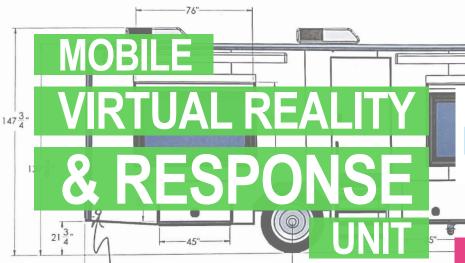
Authorize CSD to plan and execute a Resiliency Needs Assessment to ascertain additional unmet needs within communities receiving Storm Uri assistance (from FEMA, the Fund and/or the County).

Proposed budget: \$50,000

Authorize CSD to work with its partners and use all available data to refine its Emergency Home Repair program to solidify size of target audience to receive Tier 1 and Tier 2 repairs.

Authorize CSD to work with its partners and available data to develop a Landlord Emergency Repair Program that will offer assistance for critical repairs and address deferred maintenance concerns through a long-term program utilizing myriad funding sources.

Proposed budget: TBD



Harris County **Public Health** Building a Healthy Community

Harris County Public Health (HCPH) serves a large geographic area that has no public transportation. To face this challenge, we are creating mobile health units to better serve and educate our residents.

The most innovative, out-of-the-box unit is our Virtual Health Response Unit, which is dual purpose. During disasters or other emergencies, it serves as a generator-powered, mobile command center. However the vast majority of the time, it is a virtual reality (VR) community engagement tool to motivate people to be more physically and mentally active. Inside, the vehicle features two VR rooms that offer a variety of 'experiences' to stimulate mental and physical wellbeing. The outside of the vehicle has three screens to engage people in fun fitness video games using body motion control.



Features

- 2 virtual reality rooms inside
- 3 gaming screens outside
- Choice of 4 virtual experiences to promote fitness and mental wellness
- Generator that provides energy for a couple of days

Specs

- 8.5' wide



-1133"-

General Specs:

- Overall length 37 feet
- Minimum operational footprint (excluding crowd space) – 26 feet x 40 feet
- Minimum operating crew 12 personnel

Interior Features:

- Two Virtual Reality (VR) chambers
- Central control area with two workstations
- Equipment bays for interior and exterior electronics



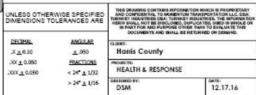
Driver Side Features:

- Three exterior play spaces
- Motion capture interaction stations for Xbox
 Kinect
- Wireless Bluetooth speakers for each station



Passenger Side Features:

- Two exterior view screens displaying action inside VR chambers
- Health messaging from engagement staff
- Entrance to VR experience

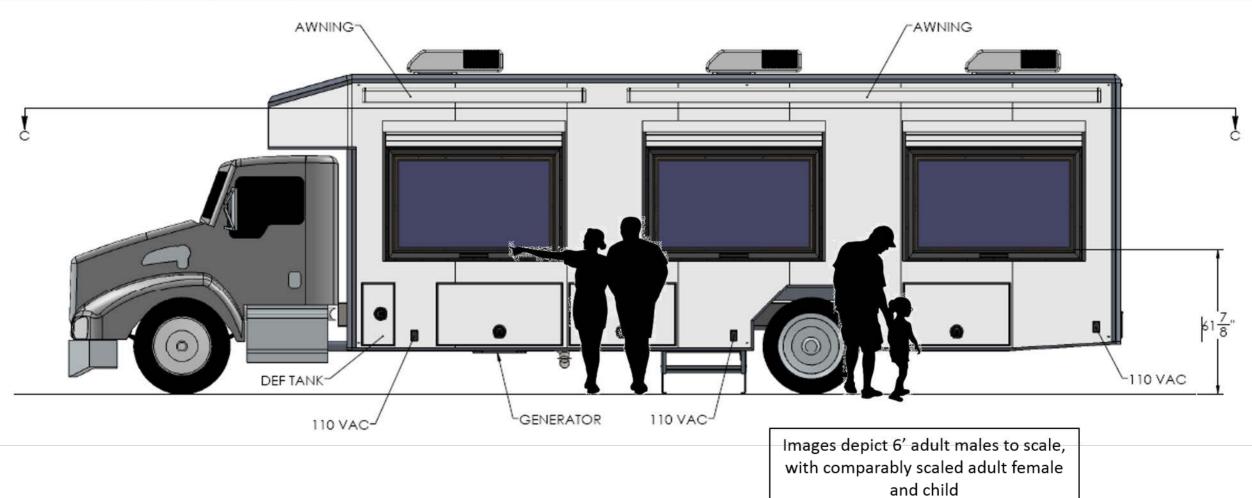




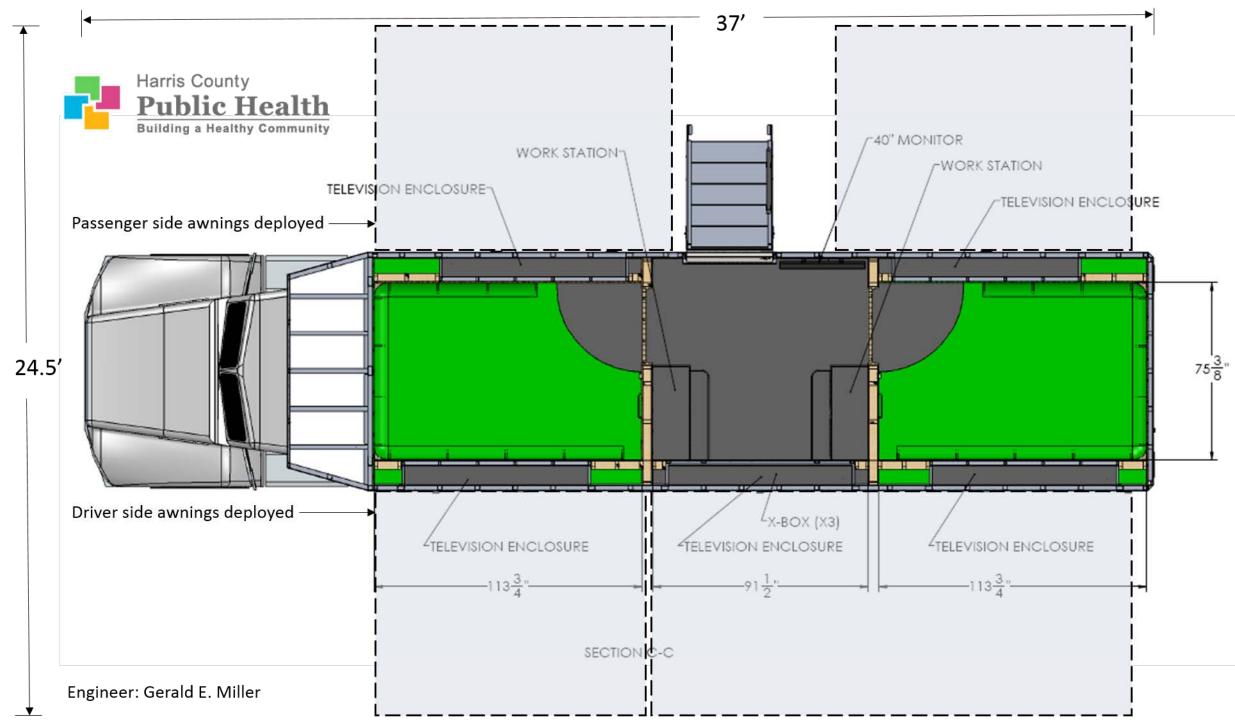
Main Assembly Images

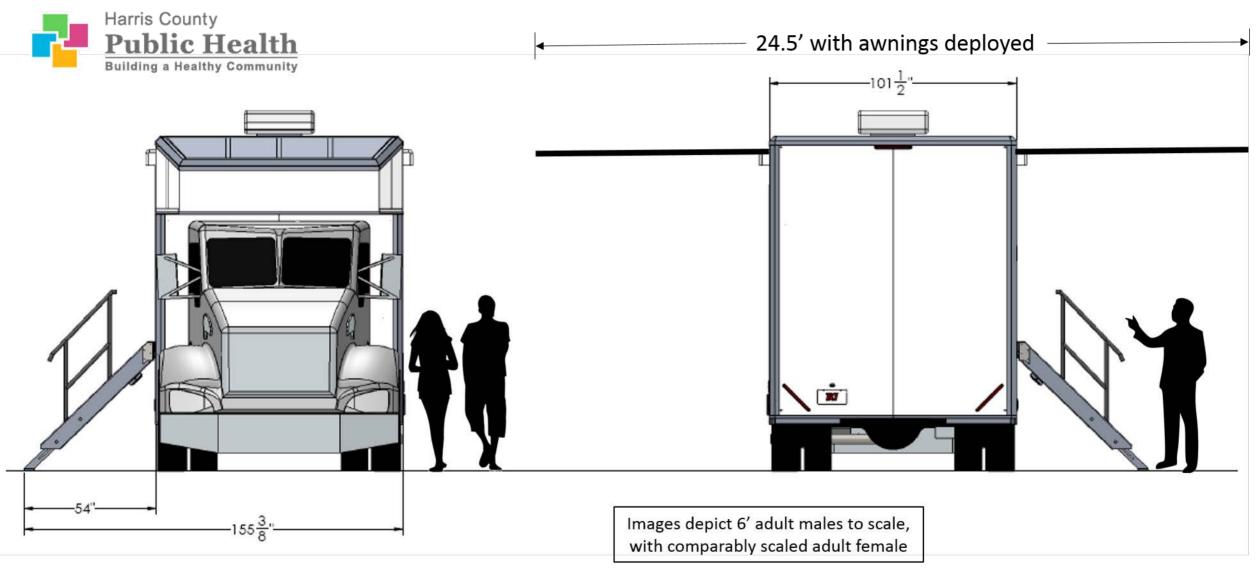
Engineer: Gerald E. Miller





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