



NEWS RELEASE

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Pre-Construction Team Provides Update on Evacuation Shelter

The pre-construction phase of Caldwell County's eventual evacuation shelter and event center in Luling continues to make progress with new planned features designed to expand the ways the community can use it.

While several steps must be cleared before crews will break ground on the projects, construction could begin as early as the end of this year.

This milestone will represent the culmination of many steps that began in 2020 with a successful grant application to the state. Since the grant's approval in 2021, the hard work of Caldwell County employees working closely with a team of seasoned professionals has shepherded the process through site decisions, land acquisitions, the design process, site analysis and more to put breaking ground within reach.

"A lot of work has taken place to get our county's new multipurpose facility through the funding and land acquisition phases to the concept and design phase, and we're eager to see it make its transition from drawings and blueprints to a tangible facility that will wear a lot of hats for our county's residents," Caldwell County Judge Hoppy Haden said. "We appreciate the hard work of Grants Administrator Dennis Engelke and our staff as well as the support and hours provided by Langford Community Services, Method Architecture, Doucet & Associates and Someday Strategies, LLC."

The initial phase of the project is being paid for with a \$17.8 million grant awarded by the Texas General Land Office. It involved purchasing 20 acres of land and constructing an evacuation center that will have the ability to double as a community event center. The initial phase will include a main hall, corridor, concourse, restrooms with private shower stalls, office space and a kitchen, with enough capacity to accommodate round banquet tables and more than 500 people.

But the county and its team of consulting professionals is looking at options that could literally add additional horsepower to the original scope of the project down the line. Plans include adding up to 30 acres of land on the adjacent property for a riding/rodeo arena and show barn that could double as available facilities for potential evacuees with horses and other animals.

John Cyrier, whose firm Someday Strategies, LLC was contracted by the county earlier this year as a consultant, is helping the county with the preconstruction phase of the project. He shared the latest iteration of the plan for the new facility being built in Luling near the old airport.

“The project initially came in overpriced due to construction costs, but it worked in the county’s favor because it allowed us the opportunity to hit the pause button and take a look at the bigger picture,” Cyrier said. “Moving forward, we have a site plan that includes the evacuation center parking areas and driveways, but the bigger opportunity for future phases and additional acreage that could hold a rodeo arena and show barn in the future.”

Cyrier said next steps include having an architect and engineers collaborate on design development and then going back for preliminary pricing to make sure the new renderings are in line with the budget. The county will then go out for bids, select a firm and get started on the construction phase.

The convention center and rodeo arena in Williamson County provide a good real-world example of Caldwell County’s concept — a multipurpose venue that can provide shelter during an emergency but serve a purpose beyond that.

“We want to make sure our county has an evacuation center and emergency shelter for severe weather — whether we’re talking about big storms, hard freezes and widespread power outages — but we know our community ideally needs this facility to serve many more purposes than just shelter,” Haden said. “It needs to be an evacuation center and emergency shelter first, but we also want this to be a place we can have banquets and gatherings that our county, cities and organizations can put to good use.”