



Justification for the use of American Rescue Plan Funds

Construction of the Dakota County Behavioral Health Crisis & Recovery Center in West St. Paul, MN

Final Rule, 31 CFR Part 35, Subp. A, Section 35.6 (b) permits capital expenditures for projects “responding to the public health emergency or its negative impacts.” The project qualifies under the expenditure category 1.12 - Mental Health Services in the Compliance and Reporting Guidance for ARPA pursuant to Final Rule, 31 CFR Part 35, Subp. A, Section 35.6 (b)(3)(C) for provision of behavior health care. Expenditure exceeds \$1 million requiring a written justification for the expenditure. Section 35.6 (b)(4) requires the following elements:

- (i) Describe the harm or need to be addressed;
- (ii) Explain why a capital expenditure is appropriate; and
- (iii) Compare the proposed capital expenditure to at least two alternative capital expenditure and demonstrate why the proposed capital expenditure is superior.

Describe the harm or need to be addressed:

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased isolation, loneliness, stress, and anxiety across the general population. Frequency and acuity of mental health symptoms has increased. The pandemic has highlighted gaps in the County and regional infrastructure for mental health evaluation, crisis stabilization and treatment. Regional hospitals are overwhelmed by requests for assessment and treatment. Furthermore, community-based residential crisis and treatment programs operated at reduced capacity during the pandemic due to outdated buildings that did not allow for physical distancing.

ARP funds will be used to construct a new facility to replace the existing, outdated 15-bed residential treatment setting and add space to expand the County-provided crisis assessment and stabilization services. These services will relieve pressure on hospital emergency rooms and provide more accessible and state of the art service options.

Dakota County uses the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA) best practice framework for designing an effective crisis continuum. Dakota County’s mental health crisis continuum provides 24/7 phone support, mobile response, crisis follow-up and crisis stabilization. The new facility will address growing needs and gaps in the “somewhere to go” part of the crisis continuum. The project will:

1. Maintain and improve locally available services
2. Provide the right care at the right time, i.e. prevent need for hospitalization and support people to transition from hospital level of care
3. Increase residential capacity, plus ability to maintain max capacity
4. Offer welcoming, accessible and trauma-informed space for assessment, support care and healing
5. Create more and better space for crisis assessment, stabilization, client/family meetings, and treatment.

Explain why a capital expenditure is appropriate:

Behavioral health care, including prevention, treatment, emergency or first-responder programs, harm reduction, supports for long-term recovery, and behavioral health facilities and equipment are an enumerated eligible use under Final Rule, 31 CFR Part 35, Subp. A, Section 35.6 (b)(3)(C).

Dakota County has a longstanding service partnership with Guild to provide crisis residential services (CRS) and intensive residential treatment services (IRTS) in Dakota County. Since 1983, these services have operated out of three adjacent homes, built in the late 1800s. The CRS and IRTS provided by Guild serve approximately 100 persons each year. For forty years, the community has made do with these less than adequate structures. However, under COVID restrictions the number of treatment beds were cut back due to the lack of dedicated individual sleeping and bathroom facilities. This further applied economic pressure on the way the facility was staffed. In short, COVID made it clear that the more than 100-year-old residences do not meet current and future community needs for accessible, trauma-informed spaces. Community-based CRS and IRTS play a critical role in reducing pressure on hospital-based acute care resources and allowing people to access care close to home.

Recognizing need for expanding services and providing modern facilities, Dakota County received an award of \$3.5 million in funds from the State of Minnesota through its Department of Human Services grants program. The grant award acknowledged the need for the facilities and programs and provided seed money to get this construction project going. Guild and other nonprofit services providers are reimbursed for the services they render, but those payments include barely enough funds for infrastructure maintenance. The payments provide nothing for capital facility replacement. The ARP funding will help defray the replacement of a facility they may have to eventually close if not substantially improved or replaced.

Also, the Crisis and Recovery Center design includes a welcoming space for people to access assessment, support and resources 24/7. This portion of the building will be staffed by Dakota County or Dakota County-contracted staff.

Compare the proposed capital expenditure to at least two alternative capital expenditures and demonstrate why the proposed capital expenditure is superior:

The Crisis and Recovery Center project, which is planned to break ground in the fall of 2023 on a portion of rezoned, county-owned property, has the support of local stakeholders. The facility has passed all local Planning Commission reviews and was unanimously passed by the local jurisdiction- the City of West St. Paul City Council. The 16-bed facility will replace an outdated facility that currently provides services to primarily county and surrounding metro area citizens.

The new facility will provide CRS (up to 10 days), IRTS (up to 90 days), and assessment services for people experiencing a mental health crisis. Mental health crises have increased in number and severity during the COVID pandemic and have drawn the spotlight on an underfunded pre-COVID need that is region wide. The new building will improve access to services for a community that is, on average lower income and more diverse, than the county and the state as a whole. The services the facility will offer will greatly benefit the residents of Dakota County and surrounding communities.

Based on the unique services it will provide and those that will be added to the existing continuum of mental health care, the new Dakota County mental health facility in West St. Paul exhibits more value to the broad community than other capital projects being considered by the county over the next five years. Specifically, this project has more community value/benefit potential than the following competing projects:

Household Hazardous Waste II (HHW II) is a second location for collecting and processing solid household waste in the county. Although HHW II includes important health, ecological, and broad positive impact on the community, it lacks the critical mental health aspects this project exhibits. Further, the HHW II project would expand existing programs while the mental health facility will replace some services while adding new and unique programs.

Law Enforcement Center Intake Renovations is a project which expands and reconfigures the vehicle sally port and intake booking areas at the County jail in Hastings. Although the Intake Renovation Project supports the safety aspects of the jail population and the staff that cares for them, it lacks the broad mental health treatment and public drop-in components of the Crisis and Recovery Center project.