



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

Community Development Board - Meeting Minutes

2825 3rd Avenue North, Billings, MT 59101 Phone: 406.657.8281 Fax: 406.294.7595 Relay: 711 www.CityofBillings.net/ComDev

Regular Meeting of the Community Development Board

December 1, 2020

Board Members Present: Rebecca Noell, Joe Stockburger, Katrina Kruger, Jim Corson, Jessica Schmidt, Shane Noble, Bret Rutherford, Hannah Olson, Laura Gittings-Carlson

Board Members Excused: Council Member Denise Joy

Staff Present: Brenda Beckett, Dina Harmon, Tam Rodier, Carly Collins

Welcome / Introductions / Announcements: The Community Development (CD) Board met via virtual videoconference as scheduled. Board Chair, Rebecca Noell, called the meeting to order at approximately 3:00pm.

Public Comment: No public comment.

Meeting Minutes: Board member, Jim Corson, moved to approve the November meeting minutes. Board member, Shane Noble, seconded the motion. A vote was taken, and the minutes were approved unanimously.

Staff Reports:

- Foreclosure Acquisition / Housing Rehabilitation Program:** The Request for Proposals on the 930 Steffanich property is advertised on the City website and will remain open until a contract can be executed. No proposals have been submitted. Staff will discuss options for how to move forward with this project in the next couple of months.

Construction at the 817 N. 22nd Street property is ongoing and progressing as scheduled. There is a new concrete driveway and carport. New siding, sheetrock and windows have also been installed. Board Chair, Rebecca Noell, requested a picture tour of this property at a future meeting.
- Housing Rehabilitation:** One new application was received in November. Staff continues to field calls for information and sends out brochures and applications to those who express interest in the program.
- First Time Homebuyer Program:** The program has three closings scheduled for this month. There is funding available for several additional households.
- Affordable Housing Development:** The NeighborWorks project at the C & C Resident Owned Community (ROC) is moving forward. Sanderson Stewart recently held a meeting to discuss improvements with the residents. They are working on the grating design and drainage as well as researching City permits needed for next steps. No visible infrastructure updates have been completed yet. Four small reimbursement requests have been made to date.
- Billings-Metro VISTA Project:** Staff is actively recruiting to secure candidates who would start service in January. The goal is five total member placements for this recruitment cycle. Staff is also working through Host Site monitoring via VISTA member and VISTA Supervisor interviews as there are several new sites this year. The discussions have been to ensure members and Supervisors are following VISTA guidelines as well as discuss their needs to effectively serve and supervise, especially via tele-service.

Application and Allocation Review: Brenda Beckett discussed changes made to the Application and Allocation Guidebook where date changes and language updates discussing the shortened process for electronic submissions. Brenda reviewed the CD application and allocation process, which begins each year in December. Applications are due at the end of January this year. If any other applications are received after the deadline, the Board will review them and attend site visits as needed. Following this, the CD Board will have an opportunity to review the Annual Action Plan and funding recommendations as well as what funding is remaining for each

program and how Program Income is being spent. This is to ensure appropriate funding allocations are made for all projects and there will be enough funds available to carry projects through to the next fiscal year. There will be a 30-day public comment period for the second year of Annual Action Plan review this year. In April, the CD Board will make recommendations to City Council. Following public hearing, City Council will make an action recommendation for the Annual Action Plan before it is submitted to HUD by CD staff in May. Brenda also noted there will not be a City financial audit for HOME or CDBG this year as the focus will be on CARES Act funding.

Board Chair Rebecca introduced a motion to approve the drafted application and materials. Board Member, Jim Corson, moved the motion and Board Member, Katrina Kruger, seconded the motion. A vote was taken, and the application materials were approved unanimously.

Community Development Block Grant COVID-19 (CDBG-CV) / CARES Act Funding: Staff and AmeriCorps VISTA Members, Amber Nichols and Blake Matthews, provided a summary of the drafted Billings Community Coronavirus Assessment Report. 3,507 community member survey responses were returned and 25 out of 70 service provider surveys were returned. This number is significantly higher than expected and required a large amount of data entry. 1,460 community member survey responses were from low-income Billings residents. The most significant reported impacts were decreased income, lack of food or groceries, and trouble making utility payments. Other significant findings indicate a lack of support that might assist with childcare, completing daily activities, or in case of emergency. Well over half of respondents report a higher stress level. Community members report being most aware of food bank / pantry assistance and emergency housing assistance programs; and they are using these programs the most as well. The top reported use of public assistance programs was for unemployment compensation followed by SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and health insurance.

Jim Corson mentioned that access to supplies such as disinfecting wipes or hand sanitizer may not be as much of an issue now and could have changed due to an increase in production since the time of the survey. Staff expressed that it is important to acknowledge that the assessment results are just a snapshot of time, but this is the best tool that we have in order to evaluate many community needs. Jim Corson also noted that the data seems to reveal a large percentage of respondents weren't aware of the resources at all. It is not clear why there appears to be a lack of knowledge of resources. Board Member, Shane Noble, mentioned that a variety of mediums are often needed in order to share information among groups. Staff noted that marketing for these other available funding sources may have been lacking due to limited time, resources, or impending expenditure deadlines.

The CD Board was asked to comment on initial thoughts regarding shared assessment findings. Rebecca Noell mentioned that it is imperative that staff and the Board evaluate service provider responses and have ongoing discussions with providers so there is a better understanding of current experiences of people they serve. Staff will ensure that service provider responses are correlated accordingly with the community member survey data. It was also noted that all responses will be available for review, regardless of income status, however CD Staff will be focusing on the experiences of low-income residents, as the CDBG-CV funding must serve people in this demographic.

Jim Corson commented about the potential to discuss funding usage and unmet community needs with other City departments. Brenda indicated that staff can reach out, though timing on when to approach other City departments would likely be left up to City administration. Wyeth mentioned that this could be done through the application process; however, due to upcoming changes concerning the availability of other CARES Act resources and reimbursement deadlines, there may be additional or changing needs to consider. CD Staff must also ensure there is no duplication of funding, and the City has received other funding sources already. Staff continues to receive additional guidance on allocations.

Board Co-Chair, Joe Stockburger, asked if there is a way to use this funding to hire a full-time Public Information Officer (PIO). Brenda mentioned that it would be difficult because there is other similar funding that flows through the public health sector, as well as the fact that the PIO focus would have to be on coronavirus only.

Jim Corson asked about the ability to use funding to keep up with public facilities such as bathrooms in parks or handwashing / sanitation stations. Brenda noted that if it was additional cleaning to prevent coronavirus, it could be eligible if there are no other funding sources available for this. Board Member, Katrina Kruger, mentioned that it would be best to install handwashing stations or only provide single use disinfectant in public areas. Unlimited access to these disinfectant products can be an issue for people experiencing issues with substance use. Board Member, Bret Rutherford, asked about how funding could be used for the upkeep of public infrastructure like this. Brenda mentioned that there are some restrictions including a three-year commitment deadline and a six-year expenditure deadline. The funding can be divided up between administrative, infrastructure development, maintenance, upkeep, etc., but there must be consideration of the guidance on property disposition and depreciation of structural purchases in relation to these deadlines.

Neighborhood Concerns and Happenings: Board Member, Jessica Schmidt, mentioned that MSNBC did an interview with the CEO of Billings Clinic yesterday morning regarding the crises that hospitals in our area are experiencing regarding coronavirus. Jessica mentioned that it is imperative that everyone wear a mask, as our hospitals are at capacity, and this is a serious concern in our community.

Jim Corson and Rebeca Noell congratulated and thanked Board Member, Hannah Olson, on her campaign as well as Bret Rutherford for his efforts during the general election last month.

Next Meeting: Board Chair, Rebecca Noell adjourned the meeting at approximately 4:15pm. The next meeting will be held on January 5, 2021.