



## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

### Community Development Board - Meeting Minutes

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#### Regular Meeting of the Community Development Board

January 5, 2021

**Board Members Present:** Rebecca Noell, Katrina Kruger, Jim Corson, Jessica Schmidt, Shane Noble, Bret Rutherford, Hannah Olson, Council Member Denise Joy

**Board Members Excused:** Joe Stockburger, Laura Gittings-Carlson

**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 December meeting minutes. Board member, Hannah Olson, seconded the motion. A vote was taken, and the minutes were approved unanimously.

**Tentative Year Schedule:** The CD Board was provided with copies and reviewed the proposed schedule. Some 2021 meeting details may be adjusted or determined at a late date as it will depend on the ability to secure a presentation time on future City Council agendas.

**Election of Officers:** Jim Corson moved to nominate Rebecca Noell as Chair of the CD Board for another term. Board member, Bret Rutherford, seconded the motion and Rebecca accepted the nomination. A vote was taken, and Rebecca Noell was elected as Board Chair. Jim Corson moved to nominate Board member, Jessica Schmidt, as Vice Chair. Board Chair, Rebecca Noell, seconded the motion. Jessica accepted the nomination and a vote was taken. Jessica Schmidt was elected as the CD Board Vice Chair.

**AmeriCorps VISTA Update:** AmeriCorps VISTA Member, Emilie Burditt, presented the goals and progress of her VISTA project so far. Emilie's project aims to alleviate poverty through ensuring economic prosperity through the promotion of container and community gardening, farmers markets, cost saving urban agriculture design (xeriscaping), and seed banking. Emilie serves in partnership with the Magic City Community Garden Coalition (MCCGC) which provides free resources & educational workshops for the public as well as connects local gardens with organizations that distribute fresh produce to community recipients. Earlier this year, Emilie partnered with the Veterans Meat Locker to donate approximately 400 pounds of produce to veterans and their families. Emilie is currently partnering with various local agencies including Billings Parks & Recreation, HER Campaign, Family Service, Wise Wonders Children's Museum, Healthy By Design, Northern Planis Resource Council, and Downtown Billings Alliance to promote various objectives of her project, including a new "FREEEDGE" program. CD Board Members provided contacts for additional support.

#### 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 continue to review options for how to move forward with this project.

Construction at the 817 N. 22<sup>nd</sup> Street property is ongoing and progressing as scheduled. Staff provided a video tour of the property as it looks today. Jim Corson inquired about the yard size, the purchase price, and the price of the project so far. Tam Rodier noted that the yard is about 7000 square feet; she will follow up with more details about costs. The selling price will be the lower amount of either the new appraised value, or the purchase price and rehab cost combined.

- **Housing Rehabilitation:** One new application was received in December. One project was completed and closed out in December. Staff contacted approved homeowners stalled in the bidding phase and sent out Request for Quote documents to contractors in order to move the projects forward.
- **First Time Homebuyer Program:** The program has seven pending closings scheduled for the remainder of the month. New applications continue to be submitted and processed each week. There is funding available to assist several more households.
- **Affordable Housing Development:** The NeighborWorks project at the C & C Resident Owned Community (ROC) is moving forward with engineering and geotechnical updates. No visible infrastructure updates have been completed yet.
- **Billings-Metro VISTA Project:** Tam offered a description of the Crucial Conversations book club that she organizes for B-MVP AmeriCorps VISTA members. CD Staff will obtain copies for Board Members if interested. They can also participate in training if they would like. Two new AmeriCorps members will start service terms in February. They are currently searching for housing. The MLK Day of Service will be held for our members on Friday, January 15<sup>th</sup>. Our event will focus on initiatives that address issues related to the coronavirus pandemic. A Quarterly VISTA Supervisor Meeting is scheduled for later this week. The VISTA grant application is due next month, and there is an open Request for Proposals for new VISTA Host Sites. CD staff is working on reviewing Host Site Proposals to prepare for our application submission.

**Community Development Block Grant COVID-19 (CDBG-CV) / CARES Act Funding:** Tam Rodier and AmeriCorps VISTA Members, Amber Nichols and Blake Matthews, presented the highlights and priority findings of the Coronavirus Assessment Report. The community member survey indicated that, as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, one out of every two people have experienced higher levels of stress, and one out of every three people have been impacted by income and employment changes. The service provider survey indicated that one out of every two organizations needs assistance with implementing virtual services and to increase their employee telework capacity. Additional findings indicate that one in four organizations may need assistance with staff training in exposure prevention. The top needs of service providers' clients are issues surrounding income / employment, food security, computer and internet access, childcare, utilities, and housing. CD Staff reviewed available funding sources to determine which needs could be addressed through other means and to ensure future funding allocations are non-duplicative and eligible. Through this process, assistance with income / employment, housing stability, cleaning supplies, and facility social distancing measures have been deemed ineligible. In summary, potential funding priorities could be the following: increasing virtual service ability capacities for service providers; staff training in exposure prevention; remote client service access; increasing / expanding access to stress prevention and treatment or mental health resources and / or emergency response measures; improving access to computers / tablets / cell phones and internet; addressing food insecurity; improving home schooling and / or childcare resources; and / or utility assistance. CD Staff will continue to research whether other funding sources were available to address these priorities. If funds were available, this could indicate a duplication of funds, and would determine possible funding allocations are ineligible.

The CD Board was given the opportunity to respond to the identified funding priorities and offer more input on the assessment results. Jim Corson mentioned that School District 2 received funds to assist with homeschooling and computer access. Rebecca Noell indicated that internet accessibility may still be a concern. Tam Rodier mentioned that the library is using funding to provide mobile hot spots for check-out. Jessica Schmidt mentioned there may be a correlation between schools being closed and childcare needs. Katrina Kruger asked about duplication measures and if there are stipulations on the type of available funding that would make an allocation ineligible (i.e. is it considered duplication if it is not federal funding, but state or local funding instead). Brenda Beckett expressed that there still needs to be more research done on duplication issues and CD Staff is still receiving guidance on this from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). There is also language regarding the complexities with extending eligibility requirements for existing assistance programs. Rebecca Noell also asked about the lack of awareness of funding and a potential Public Information Officer (PIO) campaign that incentivizes implementation of public health guidelines. The concern would be that it would need to target only

low-income community members. Bret Rutherford mentioned targeting low-income neighborhoods through various print campaigns, as he has done with another local organization. Rebecca Noell also mentioned the idea for local artists to create functional structures that benefit the community such as public handwashing stations. Shane Noble provided artist contacts and mentioned that the Northside Task Force could be interested in this type of initiative.

Jim Corson asked Council Member, Denise Joy, about whether the City Council will approve the use of varying allocations. Council Member Joy indicating that Council Members are receiving emails from constituents about the identified needs from this assessment; and there are difficulties that exist in our community when there is not a PIO and Council has limited methods for reaching the entire community. Mayor Cole also discussed this at last night's Council meeting. Council Member Joy expressed that the Council may be open to funding a wide variety of these priorities.

Tam Rodier reviewed the next steps in the process which include more research and guidance on duplication and the removal of any additional funding priorities as needed. This will be followed by the development and online advertisement of the grant application. Funding allocations will likely be limited to government agencies / local City departments and social service providers. This will reduce the possibility of fraud and facilitate monitoring activities.

Jim Corson posed a question about whether City Council is looking at the money to use for anything particular and if they are confident in the process that is being followed right now. Wyeth Friday mentioned that there are concerns about using funding for structures as duplication must be considered. Structural allocations are also often heavily regulated. Both Wyeth and Council Member Joy expressed that the CD Board and CD Staff should be prepared to field questions and participate in discussions about the process for identifying funding priorities. Council Member Joy also mentioned that not all Council Members may be aware of the restrictions and eligibility requirements surrounding the use of CDBG-CV funds. Another challenge is that the way COVID-19 affects our community is constantly changing. There must be a clear explanation of the funding recommendations.

**Neighborhood Concerns and Happenings:** None mentioned.

**Next Meeting:** Board Chair, Rebecca Noell adjourned the meeting at 4:30pm. The next meeting will be held on February 2, 2021.