



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
March 2, 2021

Board Members Present: Rebecca Noell, Katrina Kruger, Jim Corson, Jessica Schmidt, Joe Stockburger, Hannah Olson, Council Member Denise Joy

Board Members Excused: Bret Rutherford, Laura Gittings-Carlson, Shane Noble

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 February meeting minutes. Board member, Hannah Olson, 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 continue to review options for how to move forward with this project.

Construction at the 817 N. 22nd Street property is substantially complete. The after-rehab appraisal has been ordered. A walk-through tour of the property will occur following today's meeting.
- **Housing Rehabilitation:** One new application was received in February. Four projects are in the bidding phase. Funding is available to assist one or two more homeowners during this fiscal year.
- **First Time Home Buyer Program (FTHB):** The program has four pending closings scheduled for the first part of March. Applications numbers have started to increase again.
- **Affordable Housing Development:** The NeighborWorks project at the C & C Resident Owned Community (ROC) is moving forward. There is new signage installed. Six payments have been made to NeighborWorks to date. Sanderson Stewart is preparing bid packages for distribution.
- **Billings-Metro VISTA Project (B-MVP):** Two new AmeriCorps VISTA Members began service and one VISTA Member successfully completed her project at Billings Parks & Recreation last month. AmeriCorps Week and Serve Montana Symposium are scheduled for next week which will include VISTA Member highlights and professional development training opportunities for B-MVP. Position listings for full-year members starting terms in July / August are being finalized for the next VISTA Member recruitment cycle. B-MVP members will introduce themselves at the City Council Meeting on March 22nd.

AmeriCorps VISTA Member Update – Community-Wide Opioid & Methamphetamine Response Initiative: AmeriCorps VISTA Member, Sophie Czerwinski, is serving with the City of Billings Community Development Division. Sophie presented the *dive.ART* project she has been designing throughout her service term so far. This is an art workshop series designed to address the stigma of substance abuse and recovery issues in the community by providing space to explore healthy coping mechanisms. This project aims to address the gaps in services identified during the first year of this project initiative, build community, and support wholistic treatment programming. Funds raised through this project will be donated back to support the local recovery community.

AmeriCorps VISTA Member Update – Flattening the Curve Through Community Advocacy: VISTA Member, Arielle Hernandez Lyons, is serving at the Billings Community Foundation. Arielle presented about a significant portion of her VISTA project, the organization of *Masked Crusaders*. There has been a focus on sustainability, especially organizing volunteers into positions and leadership roles to coordinate the project in the future. She expressed a challenge with new volunteer engagement, but is now focused on managing ongoing volunteers, as that has been more successful to maintain the project. Arielle has also been flexible due to the changing situation regarding the coronavirus in our community. The *Masked Crusaders* project has collected and distributed over 6,900 masks since March 2020. At least 7 out of every 10 masks were provided to non-profit organizations.

Project Activity Summary, Preliminary Revenues: Brenda Beckett reported on the final revenue and the recommended budget for FY2021-2022. There is less funding this year, but historically, it is an average amount. The Division continues to receive repayment revenue which also helps supplement project activities. Updates that reflect the new funding amounts have been made to Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and Home Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) administrative caps, the CDBG public service cap, and Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) allocation minimum requirement.

Staff Allocation Recommendations: Staff recommends the highest allowable funding for administration costs; the minimum housing development amount for CHDO; \$75,000 or 15% CDBG to support poverty impact initiatives through AmeriCorps VISTA; and the remainder for CDBG projects and First Time Home Buyer program. Brenda will process quarter three figures and present more updated recommendations at next month's meeting. As a result, there may be some changes to Housing Rehab and Foreclosure Acquisition and Rehab program funding recommendations.

Jim Corson verified that the CNCS (Corporation for National and Community Service) Member Support is for VISTA living allowance payments. Brenda explained that we are currently operating a Project Grant, but we are moving to a Support Grant structure for VISTA. VISTA payroll and other administrative duties will no longer be carried out by City staff, but rather will be done by the Corporation. This is partly due to lower recruitment numbers, but is also a nationwide shift, likely because of changing management practices and structural changes within CNCS and pandemic response. Support grants usually make managing allocations and evaluations of VISTA projects more effective for CNCS.

Rebecca Noell asked if reductions are made to Housing Rehab and Foreclosure Acquisition / Housing Rehab programs, where the money would be reallocated. Staff's first recommendation would be to move the additional funds into FTHB. The second recommendation would be, if FTHB needs were not increasing, to allocate for CDBG-CV projects, if there were additional funding allocation recommendations that the Board wanted to make. At this time, it appears FTHB needs are increasing. The priority is to keep the money moving and assisting low-income citizens of Billings.

Brenda is evaluating how to submit information to HUD. There must be a determination made whether to submit the FY21-22 Annual Action Plan and then do a substantial amendment for CDBG-CV, or if it is possible to submit everything at once. Brenda will determine the best way to move forward with this and draw up a timeline prior to the next meeting.

Brenda also confirmed that this is not an action item this month – action will be needed at next month's meeting.

VISTA Application Memo: Carly Collins presented a brief summary of the memo. Staff has submitted the VISTA grant application for this fiscal year and plans to prepare a new application starting this Fall. This will be a Support Grant application, as mentioned previously. There will likely be funding recommendations of \$75,000 or 15% of CDBG funds to support poverty and homelessness initiatives as well as approximately \$15,000 from VISTA Host Sites to support the project.

Community Development Block Grant COVID-19 (CDBG-CV) / CARES Act Funding: Brenda Beckett thanked CD Board Members for completing a CDBG-CV prioritization survey prior to the meeting. Through the survey, it was determined that CD Board Members are prioritizing funding that benefits low-income citizens directly. The CD Board is also open to staggering consideration categories for applicants and allocations. Funding public improvements and social service agencies was equally weighted in the survey. This could include client remote access, handwashing stations, virtual service ability, additional public restrooms / cleaning, staff training in exposure prevention, and facility social distancing. Public Health Support was weighted as the least significant priority. The CD Board also determined pre-award costs should be eligible. Brenda will send results with weighted averages to the Board following the meeting for review.

Additional information regarding the coronavirus survey results, community needs, funding priorities, and beneficiary eligibility was presented to the Board. Since 80% of funding must be expended within three years of the funding award, ability to comply with monitoring guidance and expenditure guidelines will need to be evaluated for subrecipients through the application review process. HUD is still discouraging large construction projects. The Board reviewed the Public Services and Public Facilities funding guidelines including that public services allocations must be for a new service or quantifiable increase in service due to coronavirus and includes specific eligibility requirements. Public facilities receiving funding must be government or non-profit owned / open to the public. Small construction projects at these facilities could be related to social distancing. The beneficiary documentation in order to qualify for CDBG-CV funding for public services was discussed including the provision of income verification, statement of coronavirus pandemic impact, and demographics required for federal reports.

The subrecipient must assert that measures will be taken to ensure that funding is benefiting low-income community members and is non-duplicative. For example, in order to use CDBG-CV funding for things like mobile hot spots in parks, the agency operating these mobile hot spots would have to survey people using the park to ensure low-income community benefit. A subrecipient could also use funding to provide services for people within established eligibility gaps; for example, an agency's current eligibility for assistance is 150% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), but there may be additional beneficiaries that would qualify for assistance if they used the City's low-income determination of 80% Area Median Income (AMI).

Wyeth Friday reached out to other City departments to determine if there are any unmet needs about public facility improvements. If there are, those particular departments and organizations would need to apply for funding. Wyeth mentioned that there may be some interest from the Billings Parks & Recreation department about needs for additional cleaning. Beckett also mentioned the need for childcare noted in the survey and how this relates to stress management. An idea for potential applicants was to develop a summer program to assist low-income families and expanding access to summer camps, as this is an eligible category. Board Members expressed that this could only be viable this year if the process moved quickly.

Brenda Beckett asked about the Board's preference with application development in order to move forward with the allocation process. The Board agreed that CD Staff should develop the application and get feedback via email prior to next month's meeting, if possible.

Neighborhood Concerns and Happenings: Council Member Denise Joy mentioned that last night at City Council there was a presentation about Police and Fire which included both crime statistics and data about how comfortable people feel in their neighborhoods and various areas of town. Council Member Joy noted that there is some synergy between housing needs and where people feel safe. She encouraged CD Staff and the CD Board Members to review the report.

Next Meeting: Board Chair Rebecca Noell adjourned the meeting at approximately 4:25pm. The next meeting will be held on April 6, 2021.