



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

Community Development Board - Meeting Minutes

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Regular Meeting of the Community Development Board

April 6, 2021

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

Board Members Excused: Laura Gittings-Carlson, Jessica Schmidt

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

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 March 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 received an email inquiry about the property this week. Staff will continue to review options for how to move forward with this project.

Construction at the 817 N. 22nd Street property is complete. The after-rehab appraisal has been finalized. Staff reviewed the final costs and investment details with the Board. Dina is working with a first-time homebuyer at this property who is scheduled to close in May. Board Member Jim Corson inquired about marketing these types of properties, to which staff explained that they use email distribution lists for realtors / lenders as well as print and social media.
- **Housing Rehabilitation:** Two new applications were received in March. 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 six pending closings scheduled for the first part of April and May. There are only funds available to assist one more household at this time; however, funding allocations and the program budget will be reevaluated next week.
- **Affordable Housing Development:** The NeighborWorks project at the C & C Resident Owned Community (ROC) is progressing. Dina Harmon reviewed the proposed timeline for the remainder of the project. All activities have been released for bids and will be due April 9th; contracts are to be signed by April 19th; construction should begin on April 30th; and the project should be completed by June 17th. Dina just finished re-certifying NeighborWorks as a Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) and is working with Homeward on their recertification now. CHDO's must recertify every year.
- **Billings-Metro VISTA Project (B-MVP):** Today is National Service Recognition Day. Mayor Cole issued a proclamation at City Council on March 22nd recognizing today as National Service Recognition Day in Billings. New VISTA positions are posted on the City website and interviews for July / August members have begun. There is a VISTA Member in need of housing through the beginning / middle of August. The Board was asked to share any potential housing leads with Carly Collins.

AmeriCorps VISTA Member Update – Expanding Health Services via Equine Therapy: AmeriCorps VISTA Members Kate Van Slyck and Kendyl Robertson introduced themselves and the mission / history of their VISTA Host Site,

Chinook Horses. Kate and Kendyl have written several grants, secured in-kind donations, and organized virtual fundraisers which have been successful in raising community awareness of services and programming for low-income individuals. The VISTAs are working on increasing Chinook Horses' social media presence and staying in touch with supporters of their project through various marketing methods. The VISTAs joined the Substance Abuse Connect Coalition which helps make connections with community providers. The final piece of their project pertains to research and efficacy testing to gain traction for Chinook Horses' services. They have partnered with the University of Mary on this process, and they are now pursuing another research partner. Kate and Kendyl asked the board about new ways to raise awareness about agency services with community members. Board member Jim Corson mentioned he may be able to connect Kate and Kendyl with some community leaders for additional referrals and will obtain contact information for the VISTAs following the meeting. Board member Shane Noble mentioned that a partnership with the local Continuum of Care Coalition may also serve as a positive referral base. Board member Katrina Kruger provided contact information on Dianna Linder from the Billings Clinic Foundation.

Project Activity Summary, Preliminary Revenues: Brenda Beckett reported on final revenue and recommended budget figures for FY2021-2022. The CDBG and HOME Entitlement Grant, administration caps, and public service cap amounts have been updated. The Division has requested a waiver for last year, this year, and next year regarding the minimum requirement of 15% of new HOME allocations dedicated to Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) projects. This is a common experience for several other jurisdictions. A waiver could release up to \$100,000 for the FTHB program.

Recommendations: Code of Conduct & Recusals: Board Members had to ensure that if a conflict of interest regarding any funding existed, they would be excused from further discussion and voting. No members reported any conflict of interest via disclosure forms or during the meeting. No recusals were necessary at this time.

Consolidated Plan / Annual Action Plan – Final Review & CDBG / HOME Funding Recommendations: The Division recommends funding HOME and CDBG at the highest allowable amount. CDBG would fund the Billings Metro VISTA Project (in addition to remaining funding), Housing Rehabilitation, Foreclosure Acquisition and Rehabilitation, and First Time Home Buyer programs. All HOME funding would be allocated to the First Time Home Buyer program as well.

Jim Corson asked if the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) is allocating less funding for the Billings Metro VISTA Project this year. Brenda explained that yes, they are moving several projects to support grants which helps CNCS to manage allocations overall. It will also relieve CD staff from admin / payroll duties, so they may dedicate more time to training, events, and member support. In comparison to last year's 18-month grant, there is not much variation in the allocation amounts.

Jim Corson moved to approve funding as recommended. Shane Noble seconded the motion. A vote was taken, and the funding levels were approved unanimously.

The CD Board was sent a link to the Consolidated Plan / Annual Action Plan and was asked to review it and provide suggestions for additions or further explanations. The public hearing is scheduled during the City Council meeting on Monday, April 26th. It must be submitted to HUD by May 10th. Jim Corson asked if CD Board members should attend City Council meetings in support of this action item. CD Staff expressed that Board attendance and support does set the tone and theme for what CD staff is doing relative to our federal funding, so this would be helpful. Council member Denise Joy mentioned that Council should hear from public board members as it is an important function for various reasons.

Community Development Block Grant COVID-19 (CDBG-CV) / CARES Act Funding: Tam Rodier reviewed preliminary work on the online application process. Staff has developed a three-part online application including applicant information, public services, and public facilities. The way it is designed will allow for organizations to streamline their application process and for staff to streamline the review process. There is no limit on the number

of applications submitted by local non-profit or public entities. Staff is testing applications over the next couple of days and requested that CD Board Members test them as well. Tam will send out test links later this week. Tam has also created a draft webpage with links to the grant application, guidebook, etc. The application, application guidebook, and additional resources will be live on the City website on Monday, April 19th. Board member Katrina Kruger asked about the announcement of the application opening date. CD Staff will use a mailing list based on the coronavirus survey service provider data, a media release, a local resource email blast, and Tam will look at adding a banner on the City website. There will be public notice to announce application availability as well. Applications will be accepted through May 14th. CD Staff will provide the applications via PDF to the Board for review around May 17th. CD staff plans to develop an online survey for CD Board members to help rank applications. The Board was asked to let staff know if there are any concerns or thoughts about this type of process. This may require a special CD Board Meeting on June 15th.

The program will operate on a reimbursement basis and will require ongoing monitoring of subrecipients. There is no maximum award amount – it can be up to the full allocation (minus administrative costs). CD Staff will be requesting a 12-month expenditure deadline for subrecipients to ensure monitoring and expenditure requirements are met. This could include having the CD Board review subrecipient progress at the one-year mark; reviewing potential funding extensions; presentations to City Council, etc.

Neighborhood Concerns and Happenings: Jim Corson asked Wyeth Friday about any information regarding the City's use of funds they have received from the American Rescue Plan Act. Wyeth ensured the Board there have been no details released yet. There have been discussions regarding legislative activity related to it as well, and decision makers are still discussing what is qualified, potential matching funds, etc. Council Member Denise Joy also reiterated that the State Legislature still has a lot of work to do.

Denise Joy asked staff about the formula used to determine funding allocations in the State of Montana. Brenda Beckett explained that CDBG allocations are not based on population; however, there are several factors considered if it is a new allocation, including age of housing units, poverty rate, etc. All calculations are also done after HUD determines amounts needed for administrative fees. She will share a video of the breakdown for Board members following the meeting.

The Planning and Community Services Department had a budget meeting last week. The City Administrator is taking all of the information presented from all departments and visiting with the City's finance department to compile budget recommendations for City Council's draft budget to consider in June. Council determined there will be several nights of budget review during the week of May 17th, which will provide more time to review the budget details and have discussions prior to the final budget review.

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