



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

Community Development Board - Meeting Minutes

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Regular Meeting of the Community Development Board

August 3, 2021

Board Members Present: Rebecca Noell, Jim Corson, Joe Stockburger, Hannah Olson, Shane Noble, Katrina Kruger

Board Members Excused: Jessica Schmidt, Laura Gittings-Carlson, Bret Rutherford, Council Member Denise Joy

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

Welcome / Introductions / Announcements: The Community Development (CD) Board met in the 6th Floor Conference Room of the Miller Building. Board Chair, Rebecca Noell, called the meeting to order at 3:00pm.

Public Comment: No public comment.

Meeting Minutes: A motion to approve minutes was not made due to there not being a quorum at the beginning of the meeting. Board members will vote at the next meeting.

Staff Reports:

- **Foreclosure Acquisition / Housing Rehabilitation Program:** No proposals have been submitted for development at the 930 Steffanich property. Staff will continue researching alternative ways to develop the property and will have more information at a future meeting.
- **Housing Rehabilitation:** This program is on hold while staff works though processes to address other funding allocated to the City. Two applications were received in July. They were informed via mail about the status of the program. A housing contractor shortage still exists.
- **First Time Home Buyer Program (FTHB):** Program funds are available to continue assisting new homeowners. There are three pending closings for July and August as well as a few more waiting on repairs. Since July 1st, there have been \$75,000 made in repayments. Staff discussed this may be due to the interest rate being low and many homeowners are refinancing or selling.
- **Affordable Housing Development:** The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) infrastructure improvements at the C & C Resident Owned Community (ROC) through NeighborWorks are underway, and they have begun construction on one entrance.
- **Billings-Metro VISTA Project (B-MVP):** Three new members started in July and three new members including one leader will begin later this month. Staff will send an updated VISTA class introduction document to the Board following the meeting. One new member is still looking for housing, so the Board was encouraged to send any known housing opportunities to Carly. B-MVP was invited to Helena to attend a swearing-in event with the Governor with all new members on August 15th. New Host Site Proposals have been submitted and are being reviewed by staff to prepare for recruitment of January / February VISTAs. VISTA Members Amber Nichols and Blake Matthews recorded a presentation for Community 7 TV about their project and the CDBG-CV allocations. Staff will send a link to the Board for this. The National Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) Office also released a story about the VISTA Members' efforts being key to the success of vaccination clinics in partnership with HomeFront and HUD.
- **AmeriCorps VISTA Member Update:** Lexi Schultz was unable to attend the meeting. Staff will obtain and distribute the information that Lexi planned to share with the Board.

Community Development Block Grant COVID-19 (CDBG-CV) / CARES Act Funding: Board Member, Jim Corson, reported that he recently wrote to Mayor Cole about the state of the bathroom facilities at Pioneer Park. Jim shared the email exchange and photos of the bathrooms with the Board. There has been no response from the Parks Department yet. Jim plans to follow up. The Board expressed there are probably several other parks in low-income areas in need of improvements to prevent and respond to coronavirus. The Board discussed that these facilities remained open during the initial shut-down, and there is likely a possibility of contracting coronavirus in this type of environment with porous surfaces that are not easy to clean. Brenda Beckett stated staff also reached out the Parks Department, but there has been little follow up. The CD Division does have staff time reserved to pursue these projects and assist with getting funds allocated, as they are time sensitive.

Tam Rodier said the City Council approved two grant awards including \$55,000 for The Salvation Army to expand their mobile meals, food boxes, and food pantry and \$117,000 to the Downtown Billings Alliance Business Improvement District (DBA BID) to install a restroom / handwashing station. Staff is currently working on the subrecipient agreement for the Salvation Army.

The restroom / handwashing station under consideration is called the “Portland Loo.” CD staff met with DBA staff and the City Engineer to discuss potential location(s) for the restroom / handwashing station, which included a virtual tour. DBA staff will provide a prioritized list of locations to the City Engineer, who will existing infrastructure in each area (water, sewer, power). The availability of existing infrastructure will be a key element in determining the location.

Jim Corson asked if City Council had specific questions about the projects. Staff informed the Board that Council questions were mostly related to staff costs needed to operate the program. Wyeth Friday also said Council Members had questions about the need for a downtown restroom and handwashing station; however, there seemed to be a clearer understanding of the need after hearing from DBA staff during the meeting. The Board discussed that it will be important to bring the business community to any future City Council meetings if there are additional applications related to this topic.

Looking forward, environmental and historic preservation reviews will be needed for new projects; a quarterly reporting process must be developed and implemented; and training will need to be designed and provided for subrecipients. Staff will likely open up the application process again once there is enough progress made on the previously mentioned action items.

American Rescue Plan – HOME-ARP Funding: Brenda Beckett set up a webpage with the basic information about this allocation. Funds must be used to prevent homelessness or people at-risk of homelessness. To date, there have been no guidelines or rules released. It will be appropriate to look at organizations that meet both the needs of the community and the eligibility criteria. There are some organizations that inquired about the funding as soon as HOME-ARP was announced, but no action can be taken before guidelines are released, and a Request for Proposals (RFP) process is implemented. CD staff plans to conduct a needs assessment of non-profits as well as ask for verifiable data about services before making any funding recommendations to the Board. The Board was advised to wait until the RFP and application process is developed before discussing funding allocation opportunities with specific agencies; however, once the process is complete, Board members may want to meet with and / or tour agencies that are interested.

Neighborhood Concerns and Happenings: Jim Corson asked if the CD Division will be expected to take on new programs if the Public Safety Mill Levy is passed. Wyeth Friday expressed that there is a portion of the levy that may apply to CD programming, but there has been no detailed information or expectations discussed yet. The Board discussed that it would be beneficial if there was an equal and open opportunity process for organizations to apply. Katrina Kruger reported that Vitalant is in need of blood and platelet donations.

Next Meeting: Board Chair Rebecca Noell adjourned the meeting at approximately 4:05pm. The next meeting will be held on September 7, 2021.