

City of Worcester, Massachusetts

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Gregory J. Baker, Director
Neighborhood Development Division

**City of Worcester
Community Development Advisory Committee
City Hall, Room 401
455 Main St.
Worcester, MA
Tuesday, January 20, 2015
6:30 PM**

MEETING MINUTES

CDAC present: Edward Moynihan (Chair), Martha Assefa, Mark Borenstein, Etel Capacchione, Tracey Pakstis-Claiborne, Paula Stuart, Daniel J. Whalen

CDAC absent: Mike Larkin, Dana Strong

City Staff: Greg Baker, Steve Hill, Tony Miloski, Miguel Rivera, Jeanette Roach

1) Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Ed Moynihan at 6:37 P.M.

2) Welcome and Introductions

Community Development Advisory Committee (CDAC) members were updated on the aggressive timeline for reviewing Year 41 CDBG applications. Recommendations to the City Manager are scheduled to be completed by March 2015.

New members appointed to CDAC since the 12/2/14 meeting were welcomed and introduced. Neighborhood Development Division Director, Greg Baker, provided an overview of changes implemented during the past few years in the local administration of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) entitlement program. The goal and result has been to make the process more compliant and transparent, but mentioned need for feedback and room for continual improvement with the help of CDAC.

3) Approve minutes of 12/2/2014

There were no changes suggested to the 12/2/2014 CDAC minutes, and a motion was seconded and passed to vote for their approval.

4) Background & Updates

- Update on remaining CDAC vacancies/appointments

CDAC members were informed of the following updates. Cherylann Strom has resigned from CDAC due to scheduling conflicts. A former CDAC member, Matthew Yalouris, would appear before the Worcester City Council on January 20th for reappointment. CDAC members were reminded of the need to reach a quorum by having at least six (6) members present at each meeting in order to ensure the schedule for CDAC participation and CDBG annual allocation process is adhered to.

- Verification of existing members contact information

CDAC members were asked to verify and correct their contact information.

- Overview of CDAC meetings & timeline for Year 41

CDAC members received the latest version of the CDBG Year 41 Request for Proposal (RFP) Timeline with the proposed CDAC meeting schedule integrated into it. The ninth proposed meeting was highlighted as a placeholder in the event that an additional meeting is necessary.

There was discussion among CDAC members and city staff regarding the content of each of the scheduled meetings, with potential future agenda items up for discussion, and suggestions welcome.

5) City of Worcester Housing Development Division (HDD) Director Briefing

- New “rolling application” process for housing projects

City staff and CDAC members discussed changes to the Affordable Housing Programs and Project applications process. The City of Worcester has shifted from a once a year housing RFP application process to an open, “rolling”, annual application process. This change addresses the reality that housing projects and needs are typically market driven and time sensitive.

Going forward, an annual CDBG allocation will be made to the HDD, who must apply for funding as other organizations and city departments do. CDAC recommendations will be made regarding the annual allocations to HDD, and housing projects will be selected by HDD through an open, annual process.

Miguel Rivera, Housing Development Division Director, provided an overview and discussion about the changes. He cited a push to restructure HDD

processes over the past few years, especially with regard to the Environmental Review and State Historical Review processes to ensure CDBG compliance. The new process is designed to encourage and allow consideration of requests for funding at any time during the program year and facilitates:

- Appropriate evaluation and underwriting necessary to comply with HUD regulations
- Selection of project ready, viable, sound proposals
- Technical assistance to applicants with less experience
- More flexibility by allowing opportunities to apply for housing related CDBG funds throughout the year

Greg Baker provided additional rationale, referencing the specialized field of affordable housing development requiring understanding of multi-layered financing and appropriate CDBG due diligence, of which past CDAC committee members were not always experienced at assessing.

Mr. Rivera referenced a spreadsheet with HDD housing projects, both underway and completed, in the past year alongside expenditure information. The spreadsheet includes projects funded by previous allocations and anticipated funding.

It was also noted that this new process will likely lead to the receipt of more applications, especially for rental development. Current housing projects were mentioned as examples of the benefits of the new process, including the ability of HDD staff to work with and educate local non-profits on applications and ensure CDBG compliance. Mr. Rivera agreed to share the expenditure information with CDAC.

In general, CDAC members voiced support of the change. Several CDAC members expressed concern that HDD staff should ensure transparency of the CDBG funded housing project selection process and asked if CDAC will be involved throughout the year. It was noted that this topic was brought up at the 12/2/14 CDAC meeting, and the following potential recommendations emerged from this discussion:

- City staff offered to provide semi-annual or quarterly reports to CDAC.
- It was suggested that a subset of the CDAC membership could be involved in the year-round process, perhaps through briefings by HDD staff.
- Mr. Rivera invited CDAC members to participate in on-site monitoring visits to housing projects.
- Mr. Rivera offered to share the draft underwriting policies and procedures for affordable housing development with CDAC.

Another change to the HDD CDBG application is the request for a block allocation instead of separating out Owner Occupied Rehabilitation, Rental Rehabilitation, Lead Abatement, Healthy Homes, and Down Payment Assistance programs into different RFP applications. HDD has estimated the

amount of funds for each program and identified benchmarks in the application.

It was suggested, discussed, and agreed that reviewing affordable housing development project proposals in a committee format is difficult given the need to do so on a project-by-project basis.

6) CDAC Policies & Protocols

- Meeting process and duration

CDAC members were reminded that the 6:30pm start time for most CDAC meetings allows for commuter schedules. Greg Baker noted that a decision needs to be made whether or not the 1/27/15 applicant presentations meeting is a required CDAC meeting; if it is, a quorum will be necessary.

- Open meeting law provisions

CDAC meetings were to be governed in accordance with the requirements of the Massachusetts Open Meeting Laws. Notice of a proposed meeting should be posted by city staff at least 48 hours prior to the start of said meetings. CDAC meetings were open to public attendance. Members of the public were allowed to attend and record CDAC meetings but not to participate. Steve Hill, CDAC Staff Liaison from the Neighborhood Development Division, will share the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law Guide that CDAC members must read and sign.

The CDAC members were reminded that the CDAC was considered a public body, and their deliberations and discussions were part of the public record.

- State Ethics Mandate, Conflict of Interest and other policy acknowledgements

CDAC members were reminded that they need to complete and submit acknowledgement forms by 1/27/15 if they have not yet done so.

CDAC members and city staff discussed potential conflicts of interests with three CDAC members in relation to organizations that applied for FY2016 CDBG grants. These members must submit Conflict of Interest Disclosure Forms to the Director of Neighborhood Development and recuse themselves when necessary. Steve Hill will be sharing the City of Worcester Human Resources' Disclosure Form with the committee.

- Chair and Vice-Chair positions

Presently, there is no Vice-Chair and the current Chairman, Ed Moynihan, was elected during the previous year.

There was discussion among CDAC members with regard to the roles and responsibilities of the Chair and Vice-Chair, and the tenure and elections process. Members discussed the merits of one year, two year, or three year positions and agreed that there needs to be a clear process or policy. Several

members supported one year tenure to allow the opportunity for others to step up. One member suggested the renewal process provide a maximum of two consecutive terms for the Chair and Vice-Chair.

The suggestions to elect the Chair and Vice-Chair at the first quorum of each fiscal year and to require that CDAC members must be nominated received support from CDAC members and city staff.

It was determined that the current Chair, Ed Moynihan, will create a description of the Chair's responsibilities. This will be an item on the 2/3/15 CDAC meeting agenda.

CDAC members were reminded to be careful about e-mails and discussions about committee matters outside regular meetings because of the State's Open Meeting Law.

- Additional roles and responsibilities

CDAC will need to choose an RFP score tabulator. This member will track and calculate the RFP scores of each member in a spreadsheet in order to produce the total RFP rankings.

There will be additional advocacy roles that CDAC members may take on after the application ranking and evaluation period, including attending the subsequent City Council subcommittee public hearing. It was agreed that making CDAC members available to the public is important for maintaining communication around the process.

Greg Baker suggested that CDAC members explore an advocacy subcommittee. CDAC members and city staff agreed that message control is important. It was suggested that the Chair takes on the spokesperson role and other members attend meetings to provide support, but this policy would need to be put in writing and agreed upon by members at a subsequent meeting.

7) Brief review of Community Needs Assessment summary from Citizen Participation Process for Five (5) Year Consolidated Plan /1st Year Action Plan

A 12-page Community Needs Assessment summary document from the citizen participation process for the 2015-2020 Five-Year Consolidated Plan and First-Year Action Plan was distributed to CDAC members. City staff used this to review the finalized results of the eight (8) community input sessions organized by the Neighborhood Development Division during October and November, 2014. It was explained that the results will help inform the City's Five-Year Consolidated Plan and First-Year Action Plan that must be submitted to HUD in May.

CDAC members raised questions regarding the process and meeting availability. City staff clarified that the results were based on the input of 111 participants and that meetings were announced through the City of Worcester's social media accounts in addition to traditional methods such as door-to-door outreach in neighborhoods. Additionally, the meetings were held in various neighborhoods to help address issues in all the different council districts. CDAC members voiced support for using social media more effectively in the future.

Greg Baker shared that consultations to solicit input for the Five-Year Consolidated Plan (ConPlan) will continue with social service and housing agencies. The draft Goals and Objectives for the ConPlan will be an item on the March 4, 2015, CDAC meeting agenda.

8) Year 41 CDBG Applications

- Binder handout / overview of applications

Binders containing copies of all Year 41 CDBG applications and staff produced one-page summaries were distributed to CDAC members. City staff noted that there were fewer applications than Year 40 and Year 39. Proposals included a mix of both recurring and new applicants, as well as a mix of types of Public Service programs including basic needs, youth programming, and job training. In all, thirty (30) Public Service, Public Facilities, and Interdepartmental applications were received.

CDAC members raised questions about the staff produced one-page summaries. City staff clarified the information pulled from applications for the summaries that serve to help CDAC members evaluate proposals. A distinction was made regarding program history and prior CDBG funding in that both refer to the proposed program and not to the agency.

- Discussion of scoring / ranking criteria and process

A packet containing the FY16 CDAC CDBG Proposal Ranking System and an RFP Scoring Sheet was distributed to CDAC members for discussion. One copy of the scoring sheet was included, and it will also be distributed electronically to members. If needed, city staff can print copies for CDAC members requesting additional hardcopies.

Greg Baker reminded CDAC members that scoring should be tied closely to the point ranges given in the FY16 CDAC CDBG Proposal Ranking System handout. For example, with regard to addressing community needs, top scores should only be given to a proposal addressing one of the top needs identified through the 2013 or 2014 Community Needs Assessments.

One CDAC member questioned if staff representing the population served through a proposed program was included as a consideration for the staffing evaluation criteria. City staff indicated that the ability of the staff to deliver the service, such as the capacity to serve the proposed number of clients, is considered.

CDAC members and city staff shared what worked well in the past: reading proposals in advance of presentations, being prepared to discuss proposals during CDAC meetings, and performing individual score calculations throughout the process. This has allowed for the flexibility necessary to provide thoughtful and meaningful scores.

The CDAC meeting timeline was revisited, and it was decided that ten (10) proposals would be reviewed at each of the three CDAC meetings dedicated

to this task. An agenda with the applications to be discussed will be sent out prior to each meeting.

9) Preparation for 1/27/15 mandatory CDBG Applicant Presentations Meeting

- Review of draft agenda and process

A draft Guide & Ground Rules for CDBG Year 41 Applicant Presentations to CDAC and a draft Presentation Schedule were distributed to CDAC members for discussion. It was decided that if a CDAC member feels strongly about asking a question of a particular agency during the presentation, they should let the Chair know beforehand. This should help alleviate time constraints and ensure fairness.

Discussion focused on the presentation process. Any agency that submitted an application will present and then be asked questions. Applicants are encouraged to focus on the programs being proposed and not the agency or organization, as this has been an issue in the past. If the presentations start at 5:30pm as scheduled, there should be enough time for all agencies. CDAC members agreed to a ten-minute break after the Public Service presentations portion.

10) Handout and review of past CDBG Public Service & Public Facility applicants and awards - Years 39 and 40

A spreadsheet summarizing CDBG Year 39 and Year 40 requests, recommendations and unexpended balances was distributed to CDAC members. Discussion among CDAC members and city staff focused on reviewing specific proposals in light of this information. Questions were raised about varying degrees of unexpended balances, and city staff noted that this results in part from each program being structured with different invoicing timelines, and different compliance criteria.

CDAC members were advised to also consider the ability of applicants to spend CDBG funds efficiently. Since every program is different, this would be a good topic to ask questions of the Neighborhood Development Division Director, and determine if any unexpended balances relate in part to this.

11) Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was seconded and passed at 8:58 P.M.