

LANCASTER COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PLAN

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Lancaster participates in the federally funded Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program as an entitlement community. The city annually receives CDBG funding under a formula which distributes funds to be used to carry out projects and activities consistent with the objectives for which the program was created by Congress, the development of viable communities, a suitable living environment, and decent, safe, and sanitary housing for all Americans. The city has received an allocation of \$686,000 in FY 2003 CDBG funding for the program year commencing September 1, 2003.

Beginning in FY 1995 the Department of Housing and Urban Development required all entitlement communities to prepare a *Consolidated Plan* which integrated program planning and application, submission procedures, and reporting related to CDBG and several programs for which many entitlement communities also receive funding. The related programs involve affordable housing under the federal HOME program, homeless shelters and assistance under the Emergency Shelter Grant program, and the Housing for Persons With Aids (HOPWA) grant program.

It is important to note that Lancaster only receives direct formula funding through the CDBG program; however, the city is required to develop its CDBG program in accordance with the planning requirements established for the *Consolidated Plan*. To this end, the city will prepare a *Consolidated Plan* in accordance with applicable requirements and guidelines.

The city has always placed a high priority on making the citizens of Lancaster aware of the CDBG program including the amount of funding which the city is to receive, the types of projects that can be funded, the neighborhoods which qualify for funding, and other project eligibility requirements. The city has used several methods to encourage public input during the program development and planning process: public and neighborhood meetings, formal public hearings, public notices, publication of program objectives, use of funds, and performance, informational brochures, news articles, cable television documentaries and press releases. The city has conducted extensive citizen involvement in conjunction with the preparation of Lancaster's Comprehensive Downtown Revitalization Plan.

Consolidated Plan regulations include requirements for citizen participation in the planning process. This document outlines the city's strategy for involving citizens in this planning effort and other program areas. The Citizen Participation Plan makes provisions for informing citizens of its performance in carrying out its program activities and for seeking input on community development and housing issues on a continuing basis. The plan provides for technical assistance to individuals, neighborhood groups, and community organizations with regard to potential activities which could be assisted under CDBG or related programs.

To ensure compliance with the citizen participation requirements pertaining to the *Consolidated Plan*, and to ensure that citizen participation strategies are workable and meaningful for the city's residents, this Citizen Participation Plan was prepared in conjunction with input from citizens, non-profit organizations, housing and supportive service providers, and interested parties.

While every effort will be made to undertake a comprehensive and coordinated planning process with regard to all related community development, housing, and homeless assistance programs which impact the city of Lancaster, it must be understood that, unlike many entitlement communities, Lancaster only receives direct federal funding for implementation of activities under the Community Development Block Grant program. Therefore, it should be pointed out that funding to implement activities which address many of the needs and priorities identified in the course of developing the *Consolidated Plan* must be accessed via competitive programs administered at the state level. The linkage between local planning and program development under an integrated and comprehensive planning approach and the state housing programs remains tentative. In many respects state administered programs, while espousing comprehensive local planning and needs assessment, remain driven by predetermined program funding criteria geared to state priorities and implemented through state-imposed project ranking criteria. It is important for residents participating in the planning process to realize that even the best local planning can be undermined through a system of state program administration which may not recognize or be responsive to a truly comprehensive, integrated process of planning at the local level.

LANCASTER'S PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

There are several broad principles which provide a foundation for establishing a meaningful process for citizen involvement in assessing Lancaster's community development and affordable housing needs and ensuring citizens are given an opportunity to fully participate in program planning and development.

1. The city recognizes that the all public funding under its control, whether local, state, or federal, involves the use of taxpayers' resources; thus, the city has a primary responsibility to ensure the wise and effective use of such public resources. As these resources are derived from the public, citizens have a right to be involved in decisions concerning their expenditure.
2. The residents of the city, as well as the civic and non-profit organizations which represent particular citizen interests, can provide valuable insight concerning needs within the community related to community development and housing, particularly with regard to the needs of low-and moderate income residents.
3. The city recognizes that its citizens represent diverse interests and needs and that citizens have a legitimate role in helping to define the priorities for allocating scarce public resources to meet such needs.

4. The city has a responsibility to afford its residents an opportunity to participate to the maximum extent practicable in developing its program priorities and projects.
5. Meaningful citizen participation in community development and housing programs requires that the city provide adequate information on a continuing basis concerning resources to be available and specific needs which have been identified. Information utilized in identifying such needs, including census data, housing and demographic information, and local surveys and studies must be readily available to the community in an understandable format,
6. Citizens at all economic levels are interested in their community and neighborhoods and are willing and capable of providing meaningful input into the process of planning for the expenditure of public funds to achieve community development objectives.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION OBJECTIVES

In developing its Citizen Participation Plan, the city will seek to implement specific activities which further the following objectives related to citizen participation:

- Participation - the plan will seek to encourage and provide meaningful opportunities for citizen involvement, emphasizing participation of low and moderate income residents where housing and community development funds may be spent. The plan will also encourage participation by public housing residents and recipients of housing assistance.
- Access to Meetings - the city will afford adequate, timely notification so citizens will be given a maximum opportunity to attend local meetings and public forums.
- Access to Information - Citizens, public agencies, and other interested parties, including those most affected, will have the opportunity to receive information concerning the amount of funds available, the types of activities which may be undertaken, review and submit comments on any proposed submissions, and estimated amounts to benefit low-, very low-, and poverty income residents. Residents will have access to all anti-displacement plans and assistance as may be applicable.
- Technical Assistance - Technical assistance will be provided to residents and groups within the community, particularly low and moderate income groups and non-profit organizations that request assistance.

- Utilization of Existing Plans - Many current plans related to housing, community development, economic development, and downtown revitalization have been prepared with an emphasis on citizen input and participation. These documents have been prepared in a comprehensive manner and provide a solid foundation for consolidated planning. Recognizing the citizen involvement provided in the development of these documents, the city will rely on these plans to the greatest extent possible in its future planning efforts.

ACTIVITIES TO BE UNDERTAKEN TO FACILITATE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN PREPARING LANCASTER'S CONSOLIDATED PLAN

The city of Lancaster will provide its residents with the opportunity to participate in the development of applications and in monitoring and evaluating its performance re to the Community Development Block Grant, and other related housing and homeless assistance programs under its jurisdiction, to the maximum extent practicable. The city shall also provide information to the maximum extent possible concerning other local, state, and federally funded community development and housing assistance programs.

Coordination of Citizen Outreach Activities

The Lancaster Community Development Office shall coordinate all citizen outreach activities under the Citizen Participation Plan. The Department shall be responsible for a public notifications and announcements, provision of housing and community development information to the general public and special interest organizations and implementation and coordination of citizen outreach activities. The Community Development staff will request assistance of other city departments and personnel as may be needed from time to time, as well as other organizations and agencies involved in implementing housing and community development activities within the community.

Scope of Participation

1. The city shall provide a mechanism for continuing citizen involvement throughout all stages of programs related to the *Consolidated Plan*, including:
 - a. Development of the Citizen Participation Plan;
 - b. Application development and planning related to the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Ohio CHIP project funding including HOME funds and Ohio Housing Trust Fund, Ohio Emergency Shelter Grant funding requests, and such other community development, affordable housing, and homeless assistance funding as may become available.

- c. Amendments and revisions to the *Consolidated Plan* and use of funds.
- d. Program performance and monitoring.

Citizen Input and Involvement

- 1. The city shall encourage residents to submit its comments and views concerning all facets of its housing and community development programs in the following manner:
 - a. Through input solicited at public meetings and public hearings conducted in relation to the *Consolidated Plan* and annual submission.
 - b. Through input and comments solicited in conjunction with other applications such as the Ohio Comprehensive Housing Improvement Program.
 - c. Through the use of public workshops and forums conducted for program planning purposes. Such workshops and forums may focus on specific program areas, affordable housing, public services, public facilities), on a neighborhood basis, or may focus on a particular programmatic area such as community needs assessment.
 - d. Through neighborhood-based, project area, community-wide, or special interest organizations.
 - e. Through the use of surveys and solicitations on a project area or city-wide basis.
- 2. The city shall make every effort to inform residents of the time and location of all meetings. The following procedures will be applicable to all public hearings and meetings which are sponsored by the city in relation to its *Consolidated Plan* programs:
 - a. A minimum of 10 days notice will be provided in a newspaper of general circulation within the city.
 - b. All public meeting and hearing notices shall be placed in a display-type advertisement in a non-legal section of the newspaper.
 - c. All locations will be as convenient and accessible as possible. All meeting locations shall be accessible to handicapped individuals. Meeting locations will be considered based on the geographical area or neighborhoods from which input is being solicited or which are most likely to be impacted to the greatest extent by program activities and projects.

- d. One or more formal public hearings will be held in conjunction with the development of the *Consolidated Plan*; at least one public hearing will be held 30-45 days prior to final approval by City Council and submission of the *Consolidated Plan*. Public hearings will generally be conducted in conjunction with the city's standard procedures for consideration of ordinances and resolutions. This approval process generally requires three formal readings and involves discussion by Council during caucus sessions prior to regular Council meetings; the "public speaks" portion of each regular Council meeting affords residents a further opportunity to voice their concerns or comments.

Dissemination of Information and Response to Citizen Comments

1. The city shall make every effort to provide the residents of Lancaster with timely and accurate information concerning all aspects of the city's housing and community development programs and activities. The methods of disseminating program information shall include, but are not limited to the following:
 - a. Residents are invited to contact the Lancaster Community Development Department with questions, concerns, or comments concerning any aspect of the city's housing and community development programs. Residents may communicate their comments and concerns, or request information, through office visits, telephone, TDD, FAX, or by internet access to the Community Development Department.
 - b. Summaries of plans, applications, and performance reports will be published in the newspaper in a non-legal section. Copies of complete documents will be made available upon request. Copies will be made available in hard form or on computer disk.
 - c. Public meetings, forums, and seminars will seek to educate and provide pertinent information regarding the city's housing and community development activities and program planning.
 - d. The city will continue to distribute written informational statements and brochures materials concerning its housing and community development programs and activities. At a minimum, informational materials will include general program information, housing rehabilitation and homebuyer assistance programs, and fair housing information.
 - e. The city will respond to the needs of non-English speaking and hearing or sight impaired persons for program information on an individual basis.

2. The city shall respond to all requests for assistance within five working days.

Residents will be provided a realistic time-frame for responses which require a more in-depth review or further coordination with HUD or other local, state, or federal agencies. Project proposals and funding requests shall be responded to in writing regarding eligibility, consistency with local plans and objectives, and the program planning and development process.

3. Formal complaints or program concerns will be acknowledged with an initial contact with the complainant within three working days. All complaints filed in writing will be followed up initially by the community development staff to ascertain any additional information and specific circumstances and nature of the complaint; the city will provide a written response to all written complaints or grievances within 15 days of the receipt thereof. If the complaint or grievance was submitted through the Ohio (Columbus) HUD Office, a copy of the response shall be submitted to the HUD office.

Residents will be encouraged, but not required, to put complaints or concerns in writing. The Community Development Director shall be responsible for ensuring that all complaints are thoroughly investigated and shall review all determinations and responses. Complainants will be informed of their right to further appeal to the mayor and/ or to the Department of Housing and Urban Development or other agency as may have jurisdiction.

SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS AND REVIEW PROCEDURES

1. Proposals for funding of specific activities or projects may be submitted to the Lancaster Community Development Department at any time in conjunction with the development of its *Consolidated Plan*. The following general review criteria and guidelines will pertain to project funding requests or proposals:

The Mayor, as the chief elected official of the city and designated official responsible for administration of the Lancaster Community Development Block Grant, may propose projects and activities, including program amendments and funding reallocations, consistent with Lancaster's housing and community development objectives and plans. Activities will be reviewed by the Community Development Director for conformity with applicable National Program Objectives and other relevant program requirements. All proposed activities will be subject to the public hearing and notice requirements of the Citizen Participation Plan and will require approval by Lancaster City Council. Project proposals are encouraged from members of City Council and will be processed in accordance with established program review criteria and procedures.

2. The city shall encourage the submission of citizen comments and input

concerning community development and housing needs and suggestions for activities which address such needs, Formal proposals and project funding requests must be submitted to the Lancaster Community Development Department. Proposals from local organizations which are requesting funding shall contain a description of the project, the purpose of the project, intended project beneficiaries, and the amount of funding requested. Proposals shall be reviewed by the community development staff according to the following criteria:

- a. Federal program eligibility and consistency with national objectives.
 - b. Consistency with housing and community development plans.
 - c. Financial and staff capacity (applicable to non-profit organizations).
 - d. The extent to which the activity involves unduplicated services and the availability of other funding sources.
 - e. Additional evaluation criteria may involve program benefit based on maximum feasible benefit, consistency with the city's comprehensive vision for community viability and sustainable economic development, and use of funding to maximize public benefit.
3. Residents shall be provided full and timely disclosure of all program documents, requirements, reports, and related information necessary to facilitate meaningful involvement in the program.
 4. The city shall hold additional public meetings as part of its *Consolidated Plan/CDBG* program planning process as deemed necessary and appropriate. Such meetings will be held for the purpose of obtaining the views of citizens concerning housing and community development needs and to provide essential program and planning information to the residents of the city. The city, through its community development staff, shall utilize such other means of obtaining planning input as may be needed, such as surveys and working committees.
 5. A Community Development Citizen's Advisory Committee has been established for the purpose of reviewing program objectives and proposed activities. Committee membership include the Mayor, Service Safety Director, City Engineer, Assistant City Engineer. Committee membership is open to all interested residents and representatives of community organizations. The Committee may provide input and recommendations during the planning process and establishment of the *Consolidated Plan* and Annual Statement of Objectives and Use of Funds.
 6. The city shall publish its proposed Statement of Community Development

Objectives and Projected Use of Funds (One Year Action Plan) as well as a summary of its *Consolidated Plan*; citizens will be provided a reasonable period (not less than 10 days) to examine the full document, obtain further information, and to comment on the proposed statement and plan summary prior to final action by the city. The Community Development Department shall receive all citizen comments regarding the proposed statement and plan.

7. The Mayor and Lancaster City Council shall be notified in writing of all comments received relative to the proposed statement and plan prior to final approval and will modify proposed plans and use of funds to the extent deemed appropriate.

Review and Comment on the Citizen Participation Plan

Comments and suggestions concerning the city's Citizen Participation Plan are encouraged and should be made in writing to:

Lancaster Community Development Department
111 South Broad Street, Suite 217, Lancaster, Ohio 43130
Telephone: (740) 687-6663 FAX: (740) 681-5011 TDD: (740) 653-6618