

**City of Williamsport, PA
Office of Economic and Community Development**

**CONSOLIDATED
FEDERAL PROGRAMS**

**Community Development Block Grant Program
HOME Investment Partnerships Program**

**CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PLAN
AND
PUBLIC INFORMATION GUIDE**

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The City certifies that no person will be denied the benefits of, be excluded from participation in, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity that receives Federal financial assistance because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, handicap, or familial status.

PURPOSE OF HANDBOOK

The purpose of this document is to explain the process through which the community identifies its housing, homeless and community development needs for the two programs provided to the City of Williamsport through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The two formula programs are the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program and the Home Investment Partnerships (HOME) Program. The City is required to submit a five-year planning document to HUD called the Consolidated Plan (CP). The Consolidated Plan serves as a planning document for the City as well as the application for funding under the CDBG and HOME Programs. An annual Action Plan is submitted to identify how the funds received from HUD will be spent over the upcoming program year, taking into consideration the regulations governing the programs to meet locally identified needs.

The Consolidated Plan process is a collaborative process whereby the City establishes a unified vision for community development actions. The preparation of the five-year plan offers the City an opportunity to shape the various programs into effective, coordinated, neighborhood and community development strategies. It also creates the opportunity for strategic planning and citizen participation to take place in a comprehensive context.

THE CDBG PROGRAM

Created by the Community Act of 1974, the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program is administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development with participation by local governments to assure the most effective use of the federal funds. The program is the principal federal program providing grants to states, cities, towns, and counties to devise innovative and constructive community approaches to improve the physical, economic, and social conditions in communities. The City of Williamsport receives an entitlement allocation of funds based upon a federal funding formula that takes into consideration such criteria as population, unemployment, housing conditions and poverty level. This proposed use of funds is based upon federally approved eligible activities. The eligible community development activities are directed toward a wide range of projects such as public improvements, neighborhood revitalization, housing rehabilitation, home ownership, economic development and improved community facilities and services. The City develops a detailed line item budget, which it submits to both the local governing body and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

What activities can be carried out with CDBG funds?

CDBG program funds may be used for the following activities:

1. Acquisition of Property
2. Public Facilities and Improvements

3. Clearance and Demolition
4. Residential Rehabilitation
5. Relocation Assistance
6. Economic Development Activities
7. Public Services (subject to 15% of entitlement amount)
8. Planning (subject to 20% [Administrative](#) cap of entitlement amount)
9. Administration (subject to 20% of entitlement amount)

Each proposed CDBG activity must meet one or more of the following three national objectives:

1. To principally benefit low to moderate-income persons or families;
2. To aid in the prevention of elimination of slums or blight; or
3. To meet urgent community development needs because existing conditions pose a serious and immediate threat to the health or welfare of the community and other financial resources are not available to meet such needs.

How does an organization apply for CDBG funds?

Non-profit 501 (c) (3) organizations may request grant applications for funding for eligible CDBG projects during the month of August each year. Applications must be submitted to the Office of Economic and Community Development, City Hall, 245 W. Fourth Street, Williamsport, PA 17701.

THE SECTION 108 LOAN GUARANTEE PROGRAM

What is the Section 108 Program?

Section 108 of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 authorized a program of community development loan guarantee assistance. Through the Section 108 Program, the City may obtain front-end financing for large-scale community and economic development projects that are too expensive to finance in a single CDBG program year.

Projects eligible for this financing include the acquisition of real property, the rehabilitation of publicly owned real property, the rehabilitation of housing, and related relocation, clearance and site improvements. As with all CDBG program activities, the projects financed under the Section 108 program must either principally benefit low and moderate-income persons, aid in the elimination or prevention of slums and blight, or meet other community development needs having a particular urgency.

What is the process for citizen comment with the Section 108 Program?

If the City of Williamsport submits an application for a Section 108 Guaranteed Loan, all applicable sections of the Citizen Participation Plan shall be followed. Citizens shall be provided with the opportunity to participate in the development of the application, and low and moderate income persons, minorities and residents of blighted neighborhoods shall be encouraged to state their views and to submit proposals as appropriate.

Citizens shall be provided with adequate information concerning the amount of funds available, the range of activities that may be undertaken and other important program requirements.

The City of Williamsport shall notify the public and schedule the following two (2) public hearings at times and locations that are convenient to all citizens and accessible to handicapped persons.

- (1) One (1) public hearing shall be held to obtain the views of citizens to assist in determining need; and
- (2) One (1) public hearing shall be held on the application contents prior to official action authorizing submission of the application.

THE HOME PROGRAM

What is the purpose of the HOME Program?

The HOME Program is part of the federal government's commitment to provide decent, safe and affordable housing to all Americans, and to alleviate the problems of excessive rent burdens, homelessness and deteriorating housing stock in the nation. The Home Program was created under Title II (the Home Investment Partnerships Act) of the National Affordable Housing Act of 1990. The HOME Program provides funding and general guidelines to state and local governments and empowers them to design and tailor affordable housing strategies to address local needs and housing conditions. The general purposes of the HOME Program are as follows:

- A. to expand the supply of decent and affordable housing for low and very low-income residents. Such housing includes existing rental housing made affordable through tenant-based rental assistance;

- B. to strengthen the abilities of state and local governments to design and implement strategies for achieving adequate supplies of decent, affordable housing;
- C. to provide both financial and technical assistance to participating jurisdictions, including the development of model programs for affordable low income housing; and
- D. to extend and strengthen partnerships among all levels of government and the private sector, including for-profit and nonprofit organizations, in the production and operation of affordable housing.

What activities can be carried out with HOME funds?

HOME Program funds may be used for a variety of activities to develop and support affordable housing. Eligible activities include: tenant-based rental assistance, assistance to first-time homebuyers and existing homeowners, property acquisition, new construction, reconstruction, moderate or substantial rehabilitation, site improvements, demolition, relocation expenses and other reasonable and necessary expenses related to development of non-luxury housing. Up to 10% of the HOME allocation may be used for planning and administrative costs associated with the HOME program.

What are the obligations of the HOME Program?

The City is a distressed community. In agreement with CPD 02-1, as a distressed community, the City of Williamsport is not required to provide a match for its HOME funds.

What role do nonprofit organizations play in the HOME Program?

The City is required to reserve at least 15% of its HOME funds for housing to be developed, sponsored or owned by a community housing development organization (CHDO). A CHDO is a private, nonprofit organization that has among its purposes, the provision of decent housing that is affordable to low income and moderate-income persons. The City has three designated CHDO's: STEP, Inc., Lycoming Neighborhood Development Corporation and Williamsport/Lycoming Habitat for Humanity.

How does a nonprofit organization apply for HOME funds?

To apply for HOME funding, funding requests from local non-profit organizations must be submitted to the Office of Economic and Community Development, City Hall, 245 W. Fourth Street, Williamsport, PA 17701 during the month of August each year. Any activity funded by the City's HOME Program must be consistent with the goals and objectives of the City's Consolidated Plan.

THE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PLAN

What is the Citizen Participation Plan? What kind of information does it provide?

The City of Williamsport, through the Office of Economic and Community Development (OECD), utilizes the programs of various Federal and State agencies including the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) to implement housing and community development related activities.

The Citizen Participation Plan outlines the municipality's policies and procedures for public involvement in the development of the Consolidated Plan. The Citizen Participation Plan also describes the process to be used in preparing and implementing the City's housing and community development programs as required by HUD. The OECD recognizes the obligation to provide adequate information to citizens regarding those programs through which it may seek funding. Therefore, the OECD will insure that adequate information is provided to local citizens to evaluate various proposals. The City will also provide the proper forum to obtain citizen views on housing and community development related issues.

The City receives annual grants from HUD resulting from its classification as an "entitlement" community. The City is also eligible to apply for supplemental funds under the Section 108 Loan Guarantee Program. The City may exercise its option to apply for Section 108 Loan Guarantee funding and in so doing will follow the procedures outlined in this Citizen Participation Plan.

The OECD recognizes that persons affected by public action should have a voice in policy formulation. Although the various housing and community development related activities are designed to have a long-term beneficial effect on the community, these activities may also have an adverse impact on some individuals. Therefore, it is important that Williamsport citizens know what activities are being planned so that they have an opportunity to present their views.

The City recognizes the need to consult and coordinate with its own departments, the appropriate public and private agencies, and local public housing authorities to assure that its programs and plans are comprehensive and to address any statutory purposes. It will also confer with social service agencies regarding the housing needs of children, elderly persons, persons with disabilities, homeless persons, and other categories of residents. The City will consult with State and local health and child welfare agencies, and examine existing data on hazards and poisonings, including health department data on the addresses of housing units in which children have been identified as lead poisoned.

In order to comply with the citizen participation program requirements relative to citizen participation, the OECD has developed this Citizen Participation Plan. Generally, the

plan is designed to insure the involvement of affected persons and other concerned citizens, the openness and freedom of access to information, the adequate and timely presentation of pertinent data, the submission of views and proposals, and the continuity of citizen participation through each stage of resulting activities.

The OECD shall provide for full public access to information pertaining to any program under which funding is sought or concerning the use of funds from any program used for housing and community development activities and administered by the OECD. Efforts will be made to make adequate information available to citizens, especially to those of low, very low, and poverty income and to those residing in slum and blighted areas and in areas where funds from Federal or State programs are proposed to be used. At the time the OECD initiates the process to seek specific funding, the following program information shall be provided:

- A. The total amount of funds expected to be available to the City for housing and community development activities under the program(s) being assessed;
- B. The range of activities that may be undertaken with these funds;
- C. The estimated amount of funds proposed to be used for activities that will benefit low, very low, and poverty income persons;
- D. The possibility of residential and/or commercial displacement resulting from program implementation and the plans for minimizing such displacement, and;
- E. The types and levels of assistance to be made available to persons displaced by contemplated activities.

[The City shall make use of its internet site. Advertisements for public comment, public hearings and availability of program documents or benefits shall be published on the website at \[www.cityofwilliamsport.org\]\(http://www.cityofwilliamsport.org\).](#)

Upon completion of an application for funding by the OECD and submission of the application to the appropriate agency, the City shall publish a notice in a newspaper of general circulation if program regulations so require. The notice shall appear in the Williamsport [Sun-Gazette](#) and indicate that necessary documentation has been submitted and is available to interested parties upon request. The OECD shall make copies of the appropriate documentation available in the Office of Economic and Community Development, City Hall, 245 W. Fourth Street, Williamsport, PA [and on its website at \[www.cityofwilliamsport.org\]\(http://www.cityofwilliamsport.org\)](#).

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What is the Consolidated Plan?

The Consolidated Plan serves the following functions: (1) a planning document for communities, which builds on a participatory process at the lowest levels; (2) an application for Federal funds under HUD's formula grant programs; and (3) a strategy to be followed in administering HUD programs.

Upon completion of the proposed CP, the City shall publish the proposed CP or summary of the CP in sufficient time to permit citizens with an opportunity to comment on the CP prior to its approval and adoption by the City Council. The notice will appear in a non-legal section of a paper of general circulation such as the Williamsport Sun-Gazette at least thirty (30) calendar days prior to the adoption of the CP and will indicate locations where the Plan will available for public review and the web address where it can be found on the City's website. The Plan will be on public display for a period of not less than thirty (30) days.

Upon approval of the CP, the City shall publish a notice in a newspaper of general circulation if program regulations so require. The notice shall appear in a paper such as the Williamsport Sun- Gazette and indicate that necessary documentation has been submitted and is available to interested parties upon request.

Is technical assistance available?

OECD staff, staff of other City agencies or third party contractors to the City or its agencies may offer technical assistance to citizen participants, low, very low, and poverty income groups or persons to enable them to understand the requirements associated with various programs such as Davis-Bacon, fair labor standards, environmental policies, equal opportunity requirements, relocation provisions, etc.

Technical assistance will also be provided to groups representative of persons of low, very low, and poverty income that request assistance in developing proposals. Such assistance will be made available upon request by interested citizens or organizations to the City's OECD Director. In addition, the OECD, through the public hearings, will review such program requirements and will have available for interested parties handout materials dealing with technical program requirements. Furthermore, the OECD will provide interpretation services to any non-speaking person who may require such assistance in understanding a particular program being planned or administered by the OECD, if such assistance is requested.

What opportunities are there for citizen comments?

The OECD will conduct a public hearing or hearings on specific application proposals in accordance with Federal or State requirements for the subject program under consideration.

An initial hearing will be held to obtain the views of interested citizens and organizations regarding overall community development and housing needs, development of proposed activities, and a review of program performance. This initial public hearing will be held before the proposed CP is published for public comment. The second hearing will be held to obtain the views of interested citizens and organizations on the particular funding application.

Generally, hearings shall be held in City Hall, which is centrally located within the City. Such hearings will be duly advertised. All public hearings will be held in facilities that afford accessibility for persons with disabilities. At least ten (10) calendar days prior to any hearing, a notice shall be published in the non-legal section of a paper of general circulation such as the Williamsport Sun-Gazette. The notice will give the date, time, place and topics to be considered at the hearing.

In addition, the times, dates and purposes of public hearings will be forwarded to local radio and TV stations serving the City of Williamsport or, as appropriate, to adjacent units of local government. Notices will also be sent to social service agencies and other public and semi-public groups that may have particular interest or be affected by the proposed program. The OECD will work with these agencies and groups to encourage participation in the hearing process on the part of low, very low, and poverty income persons who reside in areas where funds will be spent. The OECD will also work with these agencies and groups to involve persons who reside in low, very low, or poverty income neighborhoods. All notices of the second hearing will also contain a detailed description of the area or areas affected by the project activities in an effort to alert the residents of such areas of such proposals and to encourage their participation in the hearing process.

If any organization or group representing affected resident's requests to be involved in the citizen participation process, the OECD shall place such group on the OECD's list of representative groups and organizations. The OECD office shall be responsible for maintaining a list of representative groups and organizations.

The Community Development Director shall have the responsibility for calling meetings and hearings with citizens likely to be affected by activities undertaken by the OECD. The Community Development Director shall also develop procedures for meetings and hearings and for moderating such meetings.

[To accommodate non-English speaking or disabled persons, material on the program shall be made available in alternative formats, upon request. Each publication on the](#)

programs shall include the above statement so that affected citizens may request information in a format that they can understand.

The OECD will consider and respond in writing to all comments, views or proposals submitted either verbally or in writing at public hearings or meetings. The response to a request for activities or projects shall be made in a timely fashion, but in any case prior to the meeting of the City Council at which approval of the application will be considered.

The OECD will respond in writing to citizen complaints and/or grievances related to community development and housing programs as soon as possible. Citizen complaints and/or grievances will be responded to in writing within fifteen (15) working days from receipt of such complaint in the OECD.

Can the City amend its programs?

The City may decide to amend its approved programs based upon one of the following decisions:

- A. To make changes in its allocation priorities;
- B. To undertake an activity, using funds from any program covered by a program (including program income) that was not previously described in an action plan or funding application;
- C. To decide not to carry out an activity for which funding is approved, or
- D. To change the purpose, scope, location, or beneficiaries of an activity.

Substantial change is defined as the increase or decrease in the cost of an approved activity by more than 25% or a change in the use of funds from one eligible activity to another.

In such an instance, the OECD shall provide citizens with reasonable notice of, and opportunity to comment on, such proposed changes in its use of funds. The OECD will publish a notice in a paper of general circulation such as the Williamsport Sun-Gazette of the proposed program change and give interested or affected citizens at least thirty (30) calendar days to submit comments on the amendment. The OECD shall consider any such comments and, if the City deems appropriate, modify the amendment. The OECD will notify the appropriate funding agency of the proposal and provide a description of any changes. The Community Development Director or his/her designee shall sign a letter transmitting such description to the agency.

The City will take such measures as are appropriate to accommodate the needs of non-English speaking residents in the case of public hearings where a majority of the participants at the hearing are expected to be non-English speaking residents and upon

[request. All public hearings shall be held in a location that is handicap accessible. Upon request, a sign-language interpreter may be provided.](#)

How does the City assess its performance in these programs?

The City may be required to file a performance report to a grantor agency. The OECD will publish a notice of completion of the report in sufficient time to permit citizens to comment on the report prior to its submission to the appropriate agency. The notice will appear in a paper of general circulation such as the Williamsport Sun-Gazette at least fifteen (15) calendar days prior to the submission of the report and will indicate the locations at which the report will be made available for public review.

How will the Citizen Participation Plan be adopted?

Prior to the initial adoption of the Citizen Participation Plan, the OECD will publish a notice of completion of the plan in sufficient time to permit citizens to comment on it. The notice will appear in a newspaper of general circulation such as the Williamsport Sun-Gazette at least ten (10) calendar days prior to the adoption of the plan by the City Council and will indicate the locations at which the report will be made available for public review.

How will the Citizen Participation Plan be used?

The City shall follow the Citizen Participation Plan for all funding applications and amendments to the approved applications.

Can the Citizen Participation Plan be modified?

The OECD may modify the Citizen Participation Plan from time to time provided such revisions are consistent with Federal and State law, regulations and administrative requirements covering citizen participation. Prior to any modification of the Citizen Participation Plan, the OECD will publish a notice of modification of the plan in sufficient time to permit citizens to comment prior to approval by the City Council. The notice shall be published in a local newspaper of general circulation such as the Williamsport Sun-Gazette at least fifteen (15) calendar days prior to the adoption of the modification by City Council.

Any questions or comments on this plan or request for information should be directed to: Office of Economic and Community Development, City Hall, 245 W. Fourth Street, Williamsport, PA 17701, Telephone Number (570) 327-7511. [\(TDD Users: 7-1-1 PA Telecommunications Relay Center\).](#)

Do Citizens have access to documents?

The City of Williamsport will provide citizens, public agencies and other interested parties with reasonable and timely access to information and records relating to the City's Consolidated Plan and the City's use of CDBG and HOME funds. Information is available subject to applicable laws regarding privacy and confidentiality.

DEFINITIONS

Consolidated Plan. The single, consolidated document that is submitted annually to HUD that serves as the planning document of the City and an application for funding under any of the Community Planning and Development formula grant programs (CDBG, ESG, HOME, or HOPWA).

HUD. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Jurisdiction. A state or unit of general local government.

Low Income Families. Families whose incomes do not exceed 80% of the median income for the area, as determined by HUD) with adjustments for smaller and larger families.

Poverty Level Families. Households with incomes below the poverty line (as defined by the Office of Management and Budget and revised annually). A jurisdiction may use, as a proxy for data on such households, data for families whose income is between 0 and 30% of the median income for the area, as determined by HUD with adjustments for smaller and larger families.

Unit of General Local Government. A city, town, township, county, parish, village, or other general purpose political subdivision of a state; an urban county; the Federated States of Micronesia and Palau, the Marshall Islands, or a general purpose political subdivision thereof; and a consortium of such political subdivisions recognized by HUD in accordance with the HOME Program or CDBG Program.

Very Low Income Families. Low income families whose incomes do not exceed 50% of the median family income for the area, as determined by HUD with adjustments for smaller and larger families.