

Meeting Minutes
CDBG Advisory Committee
Thursday May 19, 2022, 7 PM
Via Zoom

Members: Gregory Bascomb, Gail Lansky (Chair), Becky Michaels, Nat Larson, Rika Clement, Suzanne Schilling, Lucas Hanscom

Staff: Ben Breger (Planner)

Guests: Ted Parker, Judith Roberts, Laura Reichsman, Loreto Ruiz, Laurie Millman, Lev Ben-Ezra, Amherst Community Connections, Sarah Sargent, Susan Nicastro, W. Mass RC Zoom, Sarah Sargent

Meeting called to order at 7:02pm

Committee members introduced themselves, including two new members, Suzanne and Greg.

Breger provided an overview of the grant timeline, noting that the State is considering pushing back the grant deadline until March 2023. However, until that change becomes official, the Committee is operating under the assumption that the grant will be due in the Fall. If the grant is due in March, then there will be extended period to hear from the public, determine priorities, review proposals, and submit the grant.

PUBLIC HEARING

1. Community priorities for the 2022 and 2023 application process

a. Social services

Judith Roberts spoke on behalf of The Literacy Project. Their work prepares students to take the HiSet test (formerly GED). This is an economic engine for the Town and allows people to work and become literate.

Roberts presented Fakhria, a paraprofessional at Crocker Farm, who was a student at TLP. Fakhria expressed sincere gratitude to the TLP.

Reichsman presented on behalf of funding basic needs for CDBG, such as food and housing. It is heartbreaking CDBG can only fund five projects, because these are all priorities. Housing is incredibly challenging in Amherst, rental prices have skyrocketed, making it very difficult for low-income residents, especially those that lose their housing. Reichsman commented that the Amherst Housing Authority has been more stringent lately in terms

Loreto Ruiz spoke on behalf of Amherst Community Connections, having experienced homelessness. Ruiz noted that she fled Chile at a young age. Ruiz spoke about all needing access to services and homes, that it is a human right and shouldn't be denied based on identity or displacement from a foreign country.

Laurie Millman noted that the Amherst P.S. has a much more diverse population than the State and education for immigrants is incredibly important. Center for New Americans also offer free childcare. CNA is also serving Afghan evacuees and starting to welcome Ukrainians. CNA teaches a Civics course and a Nursing aid program. Students get jobs locally at medical services and dining services. CNA pays rent and for food through a grant. CNA also helps with asylum applications, residency status, and immigration papers.

Ben-Ezra spoke on behalf of the Amherst Survival Center. ASC serves 7,000 people every year. She urged the Committee to support housing, homelessness, and food security. Ben-Ezra expressed that food insecurity is a very important need, especially with increasing inflation. The problem is increasing, especially for children, and especially in Amherst. ASC saw more people in the past 2 months than ever before.

Nicastro spoke on behalf of BBBS. She expressed gratitude for the work of CDBG and the great need for youth mentoring. Risk factors have been amplified for youth and are feeling disconnected more than ever coming out of the pandemic.

Hwei-Ling Greeney spoke on behalf of ACC. Greeney discussed how housing is the basis for living a good and productive life. Almost all other things are impossible without housing. Their goal is exclusively housing. Greeney provided examples of 3 clients who they have served helping them secure their housing and the logistics involved in securing housing, work, identification, and documentation.

Sarah Sargent spoke representing Valley CDC. Sargent discussed the importance of small business development given that COVID grants are running out. Valley CDC developed a small business financial literacy curriculum and have been working with immigrants who have owned businesses in their home countries. Valley CDC is looking to work more closely with new Americans and immigrant business owners.

Lydia Vernon-Jones spoke, having lived in Amherst since 1981. Jones worked as a social worker for much of her life but is now working to combat climate change. Jones expressed that the CDBG Committee should use a climate lens to evaluate proposals and to consider new applications. The Town adopted a Climate Action Plan and that funds be used to help meet climate goals. The ECAC could come to teach more about the plan. Ask hard questions about the climate impact of each project.

b. Non-social services such as housing and public infrastructure

c. Target areas neighborhoods where non-social services can take place

PUBLIC MEETING

1. Announcements

2. Discuss and review comments from public hearing

Clement noted that needs are increasing and it will be very challenging to allocate limited funds to very needy programs and individuals.

Larson appreciated the updates from each agency especially where new immigrants are coming from and the current needs of housing and food security.

Michaels appreciated hearing from Vernon-Jones and wanted to hear further about sustainability initiatives. Michaels also wondered whether we could hear from other committees about urgent needs in Town.

Breger affirmed that he would talk to the Town's sustainability coordinator about coordinating CDBG goals with ECAC and Town climate goals.

Michaels suggested reaching out to the

3. Discuss review criteria

4. Discuss Target Areas

5. Public Comment

Vernon-Jones shared the Zoom meetings in Greenfield are open to attendees

6. Other items not anticipated within 48 hours

Next meeting date is on June 23, 2022 at 7pm

Still some consideration as to in-person or via Zoom.

Ben