

Citizen Participation Plan St. Louis County and Northeast Minnesota HOME Consortium

Purpose

The Consolidated Plan is a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requirement which combines the planning and application process for three Community Planning and Development (CPD) programs: Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), HOME Investment Partnerships (HOME), and Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG). The intent of the Consolidated Plan is to provide a collaborative process for St. Louis County to establish a unified vision for community development actions.

The St. Louis County Consolidated Plan covers the geographic area of four non-urban counties of Cook, Lake, Koochiching and Itasca, and the urban county of St. Louis, excluding the city of Duluth. The Plan examines the current housing market conditions, explores housing, homeless, and community development needs of the county and the Northeast Minnesota HOME Consortium, establishes priorities for expending HUD program funds, and analyzes impediments to fair housing choice.

The county's citizen participation plan serves as the foundation for developing stronger citizen relationships in the county. St. Louis County supports and encourages the participation of citizens, community groups, and other interested agencies in both the development and evaluation of programs and activities covered in the Consolidated Plan. Increasing citizen and community involvement is an important component of gaining a better understanding of the needs in the county and developing appropriate strategies to address those needs.

Outreach

The citizen participation process is designed to encourage all citizens, including persons of low income, persons of color, non-English speaking residents, and those with mobility, visual, hearing impairments or other disabilities to participate in determining housing and community development needs within their communities. Special encouragement is extended toward very low- and low-income persons, particularly those in blighted areas and in public housing or other assisted housing.

St. Louis County works with community-based organizations serving the targeted populations to organize events such as focus group meetings, forums, and community meetings. Notices of meetings are published through the newspapers and direct mailings. All meetings are conducted in facilities that are accessible to persons with disabilities. The services of a translator or interpreter are provided upon request from those planning to attend.

The citizen participation plan sets forth the process to be followed at both community and county levels. It will remain in effect until changes become appropriate or mandated.

Citizen Participation Advisory Committee Structure

Advisory committees for each CPD program are established to prioritize housing, community development, and homeless activities. Committee members are notified of meetings at least ten days in advance through direct mailings. All meetings are open to the general public.

Community Development Advisory Committee

The St. Louis County Board of Commissioners appoints a 19-member committee. Their primary responsibility is to make recommendation to the county board on the annual distribution of CDBG project funds based upon the objectives stated in the Consolidated Plan. The committee establishes program guidelines which assist them in recommending CDBG project funding to priority projects and programs.

The county board annually publishes vacancies on the CDBG advisory committee through regional newspapers. Selection of members is based on the balance that a member brings to the committee to fairly represent the county citizens and their interests. Members are appointed to serve a three-year term and may be reappointed to serve two consecutive terms. Terms are staggered to ensure continuous service of experienced members. A chairperson is selected by committee members. Meeting dates are set as needed with a quorum at six members. Subcommittees include housing, economic development, physical improvement, and public service. Subcommittee chairs are selected by committee members. Composition of the advisory committee was established by the county board as follows:

- Seven at-large members
- Seven representatives – one from each of the following communities with populations of more than 3,500 (Chisholm, Ely, Eveleth, Hermantown, Hibbing, Rice Lake Township, and Virginia)
- One representative of St. Louis County Township Officers Association
- One representative of Northern St. Louis County Township
- One representative of Southern St. Louis County Township
- One Executive Director of Range Association of Municipalities and Schools (RAMS)
- One representative of small towns with populations of less than 3,500

HOME Investment Partnerships Program

The HOME program covers the five county consortium of Lake, Cook, Koochiching, Itasca and St. Louis. The Northeast Minnesota HOME Consortium is composed of ten members—one county commissioner and one housing-related individual from each county. St. Louis County administers the program and provides staff support to the committee which meets twice each year. The committee meets to gain a better understanding of the housing needs in the consortium, develop appropriate strategies to address those needs, and to propose a recommendation to the county board on the use of HOME funds for its inclusion in the Consolidated Plan.

Emergency Shelter Grant Program

The Rural St. Louis County Housing Coalition serves as the advisory committee for the ESG program. The coalition is composed of professional staff of nonprofit housing-related and social service agencies that deliver services to the homeless population. The group meets monthly to discuss issues related to homelessness and to develop appropriate strategies to address those needs. The coalition evaluates the ESG initiatives and makes a recommendation to the county board on the proposed use of ESG funds for its inclusion in the Consolidated Plan.

Technical Assistance

Technical assistance is provided to any community, or community group representing very low- and low-income persons, which wants to develop funding proposals for any program covered by the Consolidated Plan. The level and type of assistance may vary and is determined by the county's community development division. An annual workshop describing the CDBG program application process is conducted each year to make communities and nonprofit groups aware of the opportunity to apply for annual funding. The community development division also holds an annual workshop to review the subrecipients' contractual obligations and to review the HUD regulatory requirements related to their project.

Access to Information

Full access to program information and a schedule of meeting times and publication dates is provided to the public. Program records and information, consistent with state and local laws regarding privacy and obligations of confidentiality, are available for citizen review at the office of the St. Louis County Planning Department's Community Development Division located in Suite 117 Northland Center at 307 First Street South in Virginia, Minnesota. The office may be reached by telephone at 218-749-9741, toll free at 800-450-9777, ext. 7741, or by fax at 218-749-7194 during normal business hours.

During public comment periods, published documents are available at the community development office in Virginia and at the St. Louis County Planning Department, Suite 100 Missabe Building, 227 West First Street in Duluth, Minnesota. All documents are available to the public at no charge. Information is made available in accessible formats upon request.

The county is a registered participant of the Language Line interpreter service offered through the Minnesota Department of Administration. Community Development Division has designated the main office number as its designated line for this service, with the identifier code CDBG. The interpreter service is offered for face-to-face meetings or when receiving or placing calls with non-English speakers.

The Minnesota Relay Service is used to contact a deaf, hard-of-hearing, or speech impaired person. This service is contracted under the Minnesota Department of Public Service. The State Services for the Blind is contacted when braille services are required for a vision impaired person.

Public Comment on the Proposed Consolidated Plan

The county makes the proposed Consolidated Plan available to interested parties during a public comment period. This comment period begins no less than 30 days before the plan's November 15 annual submission date to HUD. Citizens are notified of the Plan's availability through

regional newspapers and direct mailings. The notification is published at least one day before the comment period begins. The contents and purpose of the plan and the location where copies of the proposed Consolidated Plan may be reviewed are included in the notice.

Public Hearings

Public hearings are held to receive citizen comments about housing and community development needs. The hearings are held in buildings accessible to persons with disabilities, and appropriate accommodations are made to meet the needs of non-English speaking attendees where a significant number of non-English speaking residents are reasonably expected to participate. Non-English speaking residents or their representative may contact the community development division for assistance. The county purchases interpreter or translator services when requested.

A minimum of two hearings for each annual program cycle are held at different times during the program year to help develop the projected activities which address the program's objectives. One hearing is held prior to the county board submission of the Consolidated Plan, and one hearing is held during the implementation stage. The purpose of the public hearings is to:

- Receive comments from citizens, public agencies, community members and other interested parties
- Respond to proposals and comments at all stages of the consolidated submission process
- Identify housing and community development needs
- Review proposed use of funds
- Review program amendments
- Review program performance

The hearings are held at times and locations convenient to potential and actual beneficiaries of each CPD program. In addition to public hearings, a minimum of one public informational meeting is held during the process. Meetings are held at different times and locations and are published through the media and direct mailings. To give adequate notice of public hearings, St. Louis County has notices detailing the purpose of the hearings published in a regional newspaper at least 10 days in advance. Information about county public hearings can also be accessed by calling 218-749-9741.

Citizen Participation Requirements for Local Governments

Local government units applying for CDBG funds must comply with citizen participation regulations outlined at 24 CFR 570.486. Prior to submitting their application for CDBG funds, the local government applicant must provide sufficient opportunity for affected citizens to gain an understanding of the proposed project activities and the amount of CDBG funds being sought. A minimum of one public hearing is required, but communities are encouraged to engage citizens at the onset of the project's planning process. Applicants must give adequate notice of public hearings and must provide citizens with a timely written response to any complaints or grievances. Documentation of the public hearing must be submitted with their application for CDBG funding.

Consideration of Public Comments

The county considers the comments of individuals or groups received in writing or verbally at the public hearings. A summary of the written comments and responses is included in the final Consolidated Plan. Summaries of public comments are also attached to any plan amendments, performance reports and annual action plans.

Complaints

All written complaints pertaining to the Consolidated Plan are responded to within 15 working days of receiving the complaint.

Amendments to the Consolidated Plan and Action Plan

The following criteria constitutes an amendment to the Plan:

- A change in the allocation of priorities or method of distribution that is not discussed in the Consolidated Plan.
- Funding an activity using funds from any program covered in the Consolidated Plan (including program income), not previously described in the Action Plan.
- A change in the purpose, scope, location or beneficiaries of an activity.

Only **substantial** changes to the Plan require a public hearing. A substantial change is defined as any authorized activity where the use of CPD funds changes from one eligible activity to another.

The proposed amendment is published and available for public comment over a 30 day comment period. Citizens are notified of the proposed amendment through a regional newspaper.

If a change in the location of the service area or change in beneficiaries is proposed, the public hearing must be held in the jurisdiction most affected by the change. Subrecipients which are local units of government or public agencies must hold a public hearing. The public hearing must be of a form and content established by the county. If the subrecipient is a nonprofit agency, the county convenes the public hearing. The county notifies HUD of final amendments upon completion of the amendment process. The official designee for transmitting amendments to HUD is the manager of the county's community development division.

If a "regular" amendment is made to the Plan, the proposed amendment is made public and the county notifies HUD that an amendment has been made.

Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report

Before the Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER) is submitted to HUD on its due date of March 31, the county makes the proposed CAPER available to the public for a comment period of fifteen days. Citizens are notified of the CAPER's availability through regional newspapers which are published no less than one day before the comment period begins.

St. Louis County Policy

The St. Louis County Board of Commissioners adopted the following Resolution No. 148 on

February 19, 2002, to ensure access to services for people with limited English language skills.

“It is the policy of St. Louis County to ensure equal access to St. Louis County services for all eligible persons. St. Louis County will not deny access to county services to any eligible person because they do not speak English or speak limited English. Accordingly, St. Louis County will take reasonable steps to ensure that persons with limited English proficiency receive the language assistance necessary to allow them meaningful access to county services, free of charge, in a way that preserves confidentiality, and in a timely manner.

A person has limited English language proficiency when they are not able to speak, read, write, or understand the English language at a level which allows effective interaction with St. Louis County staff.

County departments shall adopt procedures outlining how the department will provide language assistance to persons who have difficulty communicating in English. Such language assistance services may include interpretation services, and, when required by law, the translation of vital documents. For purposes of this policy, interpretation is a spoken or visual explanation provided to help people who do not speak the same language communicate with each other. Translation is a written document provided in a different language than the original document.

St. Louis County will disseminate, provide training, and will monitor the effectiveness of this policy and applicable procedures.

Any complaint regarding the implementation of this policy or procedures adopted pursuant hereto shall be directed to the county’s affirmative action officer.”

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