

CITY OF EASTON

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PLAN

JANUARY, 1997

Amended March 2010

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Introduction

The City of Easton, through the Department of Community and Economic Development, utilizes the programs of various Federal and State agencies including the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, etc. to implement housing and community development related activities.

The City recognizes the obligation to provide adequate information to citizens regarding those programs through which it may seek funding. Therefore, the City through the Department of Community and Economic Development 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 the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 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 City 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 citizens know what is being planned and be given an opportunity to present their views.

The City recognizes the need to consult and coordinate with appropriate public and private agencies, such as the State and other local jurisdictions, local public housing agencies participating in an approved Comprehensive Grant Program, and among its own departments, to assure that its programs and plans are comprehensive and 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 spirit of program requirements relative to citizen participation, the City 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.

Access to Records

The City shall provide for full public access to citizens, public agencies, and other interested parties, including those most affected, 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 Department of Community and Economic Development. Affirmative 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 slum and blighted areas and in areas where funds from federal or state programs are proposed to be used. At the time the City 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.

Upon completion of an application for funding by the Department of Community and Economic Development 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 Express-Times and indicate that the necessary documentation has been submitted and is available to interested parties upon request. The City shall make copies of the appropriate documentation available in the office of the Department of Community and Economic Development, Easton Government Center, 1 South 3rd Street, Easton, PA 18042.

Housing and Community Development Plan

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires the City to submit a Five Year Consolidated Plan and annual plan for each year. This requirement rolls into a single consolidated submission the planning and application aspects of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, Emergency Shelter Grants (ESG) Program, Home Investment Partnerships (HOME) Program, and the Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) Program. Reporting requirements for these programs are also consolidated into one performance report. The City of Easton is a direct entitlement under the CDBG program only.

The Consolidated Plan serves the following functions: (I) A planning document for communities,

which builds on a participatory process at the lowest levels; (2) An application for federal funds under HUDs formula grant programs; and (3) A strategy to be followed in administering HUD programs.

Upon completion of the proposed Consolidated Plan, the City shall publish the proposed Plan or summary of the Plan in sufficient time to permit citizens to comment on the Plan 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 at least thirty (30) calendar days prior to the adoption of the Plan and will indicate the locations at which the Plan will be made available for public review. It shall also be posted on the City's website to provide wider access. (www.easton-pa.gov)

In addition to publication in the local newspaper, notice that copies of the plan will be sent to agencies that directly assist low and moderate income persons, limited English speaking persons and persons with disabilities. Further, the plan will be made available at the Easton Area Neighborhood Center. The ad will also run in the neighborhood newsletter, West Word, if publication is possible in the timeframe.

The notice that makes the plan available shall include a statement to the effect that the Plan will be made available in alternative formats to persons with disabilities or with limited English speaking abilities upon request.

Technical Assistance

Technical assistance in the form of Department of Community and Economic Development staff, staff of other City agencies or third party contractors to the City or its agencies will provide 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 Director of the Department of Community and Economic Development. In addition, the Department of Community and Economic Development,, through the public hearings will review such program requirements and will have available for interested parties handout material dealing with technical program requirements so as to assure understanding.

Furthermore, plans, reports and other grant related written material will be provided in alternative formats or languages upon request. If requested, translation services will be provided to any non-speaking person who may require such assistance in understanding a particular program being planned or administered by the Department of Community and Economic Development.

Public Hearings

The City 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. 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 the City Council Chambers in the Easton Government Center. 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. The notice will give the date, time, place and topics to be considered at the hearing.

Notices will also be sent to social service agencies and other public and semi-public groups which may have particular interest or be affected by the proposed program. The City will work through these agencies and groups to encourage participation in the hearing process on the part of low, very low, and poverty income persons who reside areas where funds will be spent and groups that represent persons with limited English speaking abilities. 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 residents requests to be involved in the citizen participation process, the Department of Community and Economic Development shall place such group on the Department's list of representative groups and organizations. The Director of the Department of Community and Economic Development shall be responsible for maintaining a list of representative groups and organizations. This list shall be updated at the beginning of each program year. Additions to the list must be made formally by written or oral request to the Department of Community and Economic Development stating the nature of the organization omitted and why it should be included.

The Mayor shall have the responsibility for calling meetings and hearings with citizens likely to be affected by activities undertaken by the Department of Community and Economic Development. The Mayor may delegate assignments to the Director of the Department. The Mayor shall also develop procedures for meetings and hearings and for moderating such meetings either directly or through the Department of Community and Economic Development.

Written Response

The Department of Community and Economic Development 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 Department of Community and Economic Development 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 Department of Community and Economic Development.

Amendments

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

- A. To make substantial change in its allocation priorities;
- B. To undertake an activity, using funds from any program covered by a program (including program income) which 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 substantially 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 the change (increase or decrease) in the service area and/or class of beneficiaries of an activity. Such a course of action would constitute an amendment to an approved program.

In such instance, the Department of Community and Economic Development shall provide citizens with reasonable notice of, and opportunity to comment on, such proposed changes in its use of funds. The Department of Community and Economic Development will publish a notice in the non-legal section of a paper of general circulation of the proposed program change and give interested or affected citizens at least thirty (30) calendar days to submit comments on the amendment. In addition, City Council will hold a public hearing during the thirty (30) day review period in accordance with procedures outlined above and an opportunity will be given to interested parties to comment on the proposed amendment at that time. The City Council shall consider any such comments and, if the City deems appropriate, modify the amendment. The Department of Community and Economic Development will notify the appropriate funding agency of the proposal and provide a description of any changes. A letter transmitting such description to the agency shall be signed by the Mayor.

Non-English Speaking Residents

The City will take such measures as are appropriate to accommodate the needs of non-English speaking residents upon request. Written handout material prepared for such hearings will be bilingual to accommodate the needs of attendees. Secondly, the Department of Community and Economic Development may engage the services of a bilingual person to assist in presenting relevant information at the hearing.

Performance Reports

The City may be required to file a performance report to a grantor agency. The Department of Community and Economic Development 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 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.

Adoption of Plan

Prior to the initial adoption of the Citizen Participation Plan, the Department of Community and Economic Development will publish a notice of completion of the plan in sufficient time to permit citizens to comment on the plan. The notice will appear in a newspaper of general circulation 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 plan will be made available for public review.

Use of Plan

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

Modification of Plan

The Citizen Participation Plan may be modified from time to time by the Department of Community and Economic Development 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 Department of Community and Economic Development 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 local newspapers of general circulation at least ten (10) calendar days prior to the adoption of the modification by the City Council. Copies of the notice will be provided to local agencies that represent low and very low income persons including CACLV and Easton Area Neighborhood Center. These groups also represent persons with limited English speaking abilities. The ad will also run in the neighborhood newsletter, West Word, if publication is possible in the timeframe.

The notice that makes the Modification available shall include a statement to the effect that the information will be made available in alternative formats to persons with disabilities or with limited English speaking abilities upon request.

Any questions or comments on this plan or request for information should be directed to: City of Easton Department of Community and Economic Development, Easton Government Center, 1 South 3rd Street, Easton, PA 18042. Telephone Number 610-250-6750.