

REPORT TO NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**PUBLIC INPUT RECEIVED BY WEST CENTRAL NEBRASKA
DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT**

FOR DED ANNUAL ACTION PLAN - JULY 1, 2005 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2006

PUBLIC INPUT ON HOUSING PRIORITY

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INPUT RECEIVED

Representatives from four municipalities, Lexington, Ogallala, Palisade and Cambridge, felt better off and benefited economically because of CDBG-funded owner occupied housing rehabilitation programs in their communities. They felt better off since the program made existing housing more affordable to LMI persons. A total of 57 homes were rehabbed.. They were positive regarding the cooperation between their communities, DED and the WCNDD.

Ogallala also felt better off and benefited economically because of the construction of 16 affordable housing units (apartments) through the Keith County CHDO.

North Platte/Lincoln County formed the Lincoln County Community Development Corporation to address housing concerns. They found that affordable housing issues are not successful without cooperation among entities.

Representatives from communities commented that regional owner occupied rehab programs did not fulfill the need that community specific housing rehab programs had done.

Comments also were made regarding rental rehabilitation. Communities were unanimous that a shortage of affordable rental housing could be alleviated by programs for new construction and by community rental rehabilitation programs.

Public input also addressed funding for DPA, closing cost assistance, and funding for housing rehabilitation targeted to first-time homebuyers.

Also addressed were issues regarding housing rehabilitation in floodplains and funding to update floodplain maps. LMI with homes located in floodplains cannot be assisted.

Allow families with incomes above 80% of the median to be eligible for housing assistance programs.

ANALYSIS OF NEEDS IDENTIFIED

According to comments received, the needs identified were:

- More funding for community specific rather than regional owner-occupied housing rehabilitation.
- Shortage of decent, affordable existing and new rental housing. Funding is not adequate for new construction and no funding available for community rental rehabilitation programs.
- More dollars for DPA and housing rehabilitation for first-time homebuyers.
- The need for funding to address updating 30-year old floodplain maps.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MEET IDENTIFIED NEEDS

To meet the needs of the public input received:

- CDBG funding for communitywide owner-occupied housing rehabilitation programs. Communities feel that the dispersed impact of regional OOR programs will never meet the housing needs of the individual communities.
- Increased HOME funding for construction of new affordable rental housing. This, of course, could be accomplished with additional federal funding or by diverting funding from other eligible activities.
- CDBG funding for communitywide, rather than project based, rental housing rehabilitation. Rental housing rehabilitation is a desperate need in most communities. Public input was unanimous to allow communities to apply on an individual basis for funding for rental rehabilitation that would target the entire community to benefit LMI.
- Costs for home repairs often serve as a deterrent to first-time homebuyers. Provide CDBG funding for home repairs targeted at first-time LMI homebuyers.
- Allow CDBG dollars to be used to permit communities to update floodplain maps. Most community floodplain maps were drawn up in the 1970s. In many communities, homes owned by LMI are located, according to those maps, in floodplain areas making those dwelling units virtually ineligible for owner occupied rehabilitation.
- Allow families with incomes not exceeding 100% of the median to use NAHTF program funds for OOR and DPA.

PUBLIC INPUT ON HOMELESS PRIORITY

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INPUT RECEIVED

The majority of public input from those residing in small towns regarding this priority felt that people do not see homelessness in their communities.

North Platte feels strongly that homelessness is a problem and addresses the issue through the Lincoln Connection.

The Lexington Housing Authority is seeing an increasing number of people applying for housing assistance including emergency shelter and transitional housing.

Providers felt that the continuum of care has not addressed the issue of improved assistance to the homeless, does not provide supportive housing for individuals with mental illness. Also, services have not been increased because funding for programs are being cut or exhausted like the ESG.

Gaps that were identified in providing successful homeless services included the need for funds to cover the cost of personal hygiene products. In addition, providers felt that state agencies have too slow a response time when responding to emergencies and that more public education is needed regarding homelessness issues.

ANALYSIS OF NEEDS IDENTIFIED

According to comments received, the needs identified were:

- Housing assistance for the homeless: emergency shelter and transitional housing.
- Supportive housing for persons with mental illness
- Public education regarding homelessness issues.
- Faster response time from cognizant state agencies regarding homelessness issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MEET IDENTIFIED NEEDS

To meet the needs of the public input received:

- Increased funding through the ESG and Homeless Shelter Assistance Trust Fund for emergency shelter, transitional housing and supportive housing for persons with mental illness. Only possible with increased federal funding for these programs.
- Programs to educate the public regarding the problems of homelessness in Nebraska
- Coordination between cognizant agencies in responding to homelessness issues.

PUBLIC INPUT ON NON-HOUSING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRIORITY

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INPUT RECEIVED

North Platte has created 806 new FTE jobs in the last year through the use of DED funds.

Ogallala has created over 100 new FTE jobs through the Keith County REDI Program that is funded through program income from DED economic development projects.

Lexington will create 37 new FTE jobs through CDBG economic development project funds.

Working capital for child care centers.

Application process for CDBG ED program is too lengthy.

Retail business for small communities.

ANALYSIS OF NEEDS IDENTIFIED

According to comments received, the needs identified were:

- Need for working capital for day care centers that will serve primarily LMI
- Where possible, streamline application process for CDBG economic development projects.
- Allow retail business to be eligible economic development projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MEET IDENTIFIED NEEDS

To meet the needs of the public input received:

- Allow start-up working capital for day care centers that serve primarily LMI persons. The cost of affordable day care for moderate income families is often a deterrent to seeking or holding employment.
- Consider allowing the eligibility of viable, well secured collateralized retail businesses in small communities.
- Consult with program beneficiaries to determine where paperwork for application process for CDBG economic development projects may be streamlined.

PUBLIC INPUT ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PRIORITY

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INPUT RECEIVED

Villages of Paxton and Farnam received funding for new fire trucks through CDBG.

Villages of Paxton received funding for water system improvements through CDBG.

City of Arapahoe and Village of Holbrook received funding for water system and wastewater system improvements through CDBG.

CDBG funds for main street projects.

Matching requirements difficult for smaller communities.

Small communities and larger communities should be scored separately.

More than one application period per year for community development projects.

Written comment received advocating that CDBG funds be set aside for land acquisition and for the construction of tornado shelters in rural communities

ANALYSIS OF NEEDS IDENTIFIED

According to comments received, the needs identified were:

- Most communities feel there should be a set aside of CDBG funds specifically targeted to downtown business improvements that are tied to business retention or expansion.
- Smaller communities feel that awarding additional points for overmatching works against them because of their limited ability to incur debt.
- Smaller communities feel that their applications should be scored separately from those submitted by larger communities; that there should be a small and large community development program based upon population, that there should be more than one application per year, and maximum grant amounts should be equalized.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MEET IDENTIFIED NEEDS

To meet the needs of the public input received:

- Consider making downtown improvement projects an eligible CDBG activity where either LMI benefit is documented or where a blight study has been completed by a certified planner. A set aside would not be feasible given the total amount of CDBG funds received by the State.

- A small community and large community CDBG community development program would be an administrative and financial nightmare. Would CDBG funds be allocated equally for each program? Would the application guidelines and scoring system be different based upon population? It would be more logical to equalize CDBG grant amounts irregardless of population size because of the cost of public work projects. The precedent for an open application period for CD projects has been set with the water/wastewater program. Separate CD programs for large and small communities is certainly not recommended.
- Allow CDBG funds to be used in rural communities and in mobile home parks for land acquisition and for the construction of tornado shelters.

PUBLIC INPUT ON BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT PRIORITY

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INPUT RECEIVED

Public input was almost unanimous that this component of the CDBG program works well.

Program income has been used by almost all communities providing input to assist successful existing and new businesses that would otherwise not have been eligible for full conventional financing.

Revolving loan funds.

Incentives to young people in small communities to sustain current businesses where the owner is retiring.

In small communities, more focus on business retention rather than new business start-ups.

Cost of job training counts against the project.

ANALYSIS OF NEEDS IDENTIFIED

According to comments received, the needs identified were:

- Public input favored capitalizing revolving loan funds. It was felt that funds controlled within certain parameters on the local level would have a speedier need-response time.
- Small communities are losing viable and sustaining businesses when owners retire and young people cannot obtain financing to purchase and continue the business. More attention should be paid to assisting smaller communities retaining their

existing businesses. Most small communities, because of both size and location, are not able to attract viable new businesses.

- DED should consider job training costs as a separate grant to a CDBG business development project since the cost for this activity is charged to the maximum grant available.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MEET IDENTIFIED NEEDS

To meet the needs of the public input received:

- DED should consider using CDBG funds to capitalize on a matching basis revolving loan funds for business development.
- DED should especially consider financial incentives to young people to stay in small communities and to anyone wishing to continue existing viable businesses when the owners retire. Incentives to young people could include lower interest rates and/or performance based deferred or forgivable loans.
- Revolving loan funds capitalized with CDBG funds would allow communities to respond more proactively in retaining existing businesses.

PUBLIC INPUT ON PLANNING PRIORITY

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INPUT RECEIVED

Little public input was received critical of the planning priority. Ogallala, Cambridge, Trenton, Grant, and North Platte all felt better off and have benefited economically from comprehensive development plans financed in part with CDBG funds.

Planning grants have been very successful in assisting communities with capital improvement plans.

Increase maximum grant amount for planning projects and shorten timeline from application submission to approval.

ANALYSIS OF NEEDS IDENTIFIED

- According to comments received, the needs identified were:
- No actual comments that could be regarded as a “need” regarding the planning program were received.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MEET IDENTIFIED NEEDS

To meet the needs of the public input received:

- DED could consider increasing the maximum amount of CDBG grant funds for planning projects but such an action might reduce the number of planning projects that may be funded.
- All grant applicants would like to have shorter time periods from when they submit their grant to decision on funding. This “need” may not be administratively possible given the present staff workload. Two months seems hardly an eternity to wait.

PUBLIC INPUT ON YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH DED

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INPUT RECEIVED

Representatives from communities providing public input indicated their priorities for next year as:

Ogallala: Section 504/ADA CDBG planning grant implementation.

Cambridge: Water and electrical system improvements associated with new ethanol plant.

Lexington: Housing rehabilitation and main street improvements.

North Platte: Downtown improvements, transitional and emergency housing.

Curtis: Main street improvements, community center, labor study, housing study.

Maywood: Infrastructure improvements, low-income housing.

Hershey: Annexation project, sewer and water systems improvements.

Grant: Business expansion, water meter installation, annexation.

Paxton: New water distribution system and wastewater treatment facility, business expansion efforts.

Input from communities, individuals and organizations was not critical of their relationships with DED field or main office staff.

Communities did feel that DED staff should provide documented feedback to communities whose CDBG grants are not funded as to exactly why their applications were not funded.

Public input also felt that DED staff should be more accessible in that field and/or main office staff should attend village board, city council, or other organizational board meetings.