

May 28, 2004

Gary Hamer  
Nebraska Department of Economic Development  
Housing and Community Development Division  
PO Box 9466  
301 Centennial Mall South  
Lincoln, NE 68509-4666

Dear Gary:

The Assistive Technology Partnership (ATP) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Nebraska Department of Economic Development's 2005-2009 Consolidated Plan and 2005 Annual Action Plan. Our agency is committed addressing the housing needs of all persons with disabilities. This work is evidenced through our housing programs implemented in partnership with the Nebraska Housing Developers Association (NHDA); Making Homes Accessible owner occupied rehab and Homeownership Opportunities Program. ATP is also the lead agency for the Nebraska Home of Your Own Coalition (HOYO) that brings together entities building affordable housing and agencies providing supportive services.

Therefore we recommend the following strategies to strengthen the 2005-2009 Consolidated Plan and 2005 Annual Action Plan:

1. Increase homeownership opportunities for persons with disabilities and their families by continuing to fund the NHDA HOP Program. This program integrates persons with disabilities to the mainstream housing market by providing REACH education and leveling the playing field for potential homeowners to be successful.
2. Continue the set-aside for the Making Homes Accessible (MHA) home modification program. This program has a proven track record of keeping persons in their homes and garnering a good level of matching funds. As the MHA revised program delivery is implemented in a more timely process in partnership with the NHDA, consideration can be given to increasing the set-aside beyond \$200,000.
3. Institute a visitability standard into all new federal and state funded housing projects. Visitability is a standard that provides for wider doorways, hallways, backing in bathroom wall areas for grab bars, and in most areas where it has been adopted, one level or zero-grade entrance. This will allow for an increased market to persons with disabilities and the elderly, and significantly reduce future cost of any accessibility accommodation that may be necessary. The Assistive Technology Partnership and HOYO are available to provide technical assistance in developing a standard for Nebraska.
4. Support efforts to train the general public, private and non-profit housing developers, homebuilders and realtors in housing issues facing persons with disabilities. Training programs can utilize models from other states such as the Georgia Easy Living Home program, and national initiatives such as HUD's Fair Housing First.

**Offices also located in:**

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• **Scottsbluff**  
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5. Increase accessible, affordable and appropriate rental opportunities for all persons with disabilities. Innovative approaches like bridge subsidies can augment and fill the gap when traditional programs such as Section 8 are not immediately available.
6. Continue the department's effort to address housing needs of all persons with disabilities through the Special Needs Investment Zone and assigning staff to the area of special needs. These efforts help ensure there is a focus in the plan on housing needs of all persons with disabilities.

ATP and HOYO are in support of these recommendations and we appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

  
Lilly Blase  
Housing Program Coordinator

From: "Gary Person" <garyperson@cityofsidney.org>  
To: <jbolen@neded.org>,  
"Jerrod Haberman" <jerrod@nepadd.com>,  
"al heuton" <al@nepadd.com>  
**Subject: Written Testimony on DED Plan of Action**  
Date sent: Tue, 25 May 2004 15:25:35 -0600

Please forward this written testimony to the appropriate DED sources.

#### Affordable Housing

The State of Nebraska has a goal to increase cooperation among government entities, housing providers and lenders in order to produce more units of affordable housing.

1. Are you and your clients better off now than were last year relative to this goal?

Yes  No  Don't Know

1.a. Are you aware of any cooperative efforts that have, or are taking place, among governmental entities, housing providers and/or lenders in your area to provide affordable housing?  Yes  No

If yes, please identify the efforts and describe how they are benefiting your area?

We have worked together on several cooperative projects to build affordable housing, if you can truly call it "affordable housing" in this day and age. We have used CDBG, NIFA, Tax Credits, TIF, HOME Funds, Trust Funds etc. to package together deals. It would be helpful if some of the guidelines were a little more flexible in making them work, but I realize that is not a DED decision, but in the hands of our legislators. Lobbying the legislators to look at more innovative ways would be helpful. Our community has a lot of pent-up demand for affordable housing with more jobs per capita than any Nebraska community.

Giving communities more flexibility with Tax Increment Financing capabilities and changing the state requirements and allow for delaying placement of housing infrastructure and speculative home valuations immediately onto the tax roles would be an incentive that wouldn't cost anyone anything. Right now what Nebraska has in place in its tax structure laws is a disincentive to build any type of housing. We are never going to win this battle and be able to GROW communities without a change in the state laws on new housing development.

1.b. If you are aware of any failed efforts to establish cooperation in affordable housing development in your community, what do feel was the cause for the failure?

We had a down payment assistance program that was being deemed a failure by some DED representatives, but in reality the program brought great awareness to affordable housing issues and was the impetus for getting four new single family housing subdivisions started. Over 100 area residents went through home buyer education programs. The demand was there. The prospective homeowner's interest was there. In reality, however, there was such a small window of opportunity for being able to qualify for purchasing a new home and still meet the income guidelines and lender qualifying guidelines. In the end few people could actually take advantage of the program.

I would suggest inviting contractors, lenders and realtors who have been a part of this program to have a brainstorming session with DED staff members to tell about their frustrations and experiences with the program and how we could better tweak them as a state to accomplish the end goal.

2. Where is additional cooperation still needed? (or by what entities)

Better communications with the regional housing representative would be beneficial. I realize this works two ways and better effort also needs to be made on our end.

I did like the most recent "project interviews" that were conducted on proposed housing projects. This I feel will help DED sort out the fluff projects from those based on need and ability to perform. It adds so much more to the "application process" and offers developers, communities and organizations the opportunity to better explain their projects and the needs the projects are based on.

3. Where are the gaps in the provision of affordable housing in your community? (For example is the gap a shortage of funding, lack of contractor or lender participation, no staff person present to develop/implement programs, appraisal issues, etc.?)

Making today's land prices, public infrastructure costs and construction prices mesh with keeping rent levels or purchase price levels at an affordable range creates huge challenges for communities. Giving communities the ability to be more creative to help with this situation is needed. I would like to see a program incentive for "market rate" rental housing also. Tying all programs to 60% or 80% LMI often leaves investors with a very thin margin for making the projects profitable. 100% LMI standards would solve a lot of these problems. The demand is definitely there, just not enough potential qualifiers at times when you have to dip down to 60% or 50% LMI, especially because that particular market seems to be forever revolving with tenants on the move.

When programs are implemented to bring in an influx of new housing funds, for instance the housing trust fund, we should allow those programs to continue to be funded for the purpose they were intended. For our law makers to divert these funds for state budget shortfalls in other areas, violates the intention of creating the fund for its intended purpose and causes mistrust for future efforts to create funding mechanisms. Since there seems to be no ethical commitment to leave original intents of funds alone, perhaps laws should be adopted mandating that if the funds are created for a specific purpose, there is no ability for law makers to divert those funds.

The availability of funds are very competitive. I would like to see existing regional housing organizations with long proven track records of success continue to receive some sustainable funding. They serve multiple communities, as opposed to reinventing the wheel and creating entity after entity creating more competition for funding on a regional basis and the state rewarding those efforts with operational funding.

#### Homeless Assistance

The State of Nebraska has a goal to provide a continuum of housing opportunities and supportive services for homeless persons, while reducing homelessness through educational outreach and prevention activities.

1. Are you and your clients better off now than were last year relative to this goal?

Yes  No  Don't Know

1.a. If you have made progress in addressing the needs of the homeless over the past 12 months, please briefly describe the key components of your efforts:

2. Has homelessness been reduced?  Yes  No  Don't Know

2a. Do you have a clearly defined homeless problem(s) in your community? If yes, please provide a brief description, ie: estimated # persons, health or safety issues, etc.

No. We do participate on a regional basis.

3. Are you familiar with the continuum of care process to assist the homeless?

Yes (If yes, please answer questions #4 and #5 below)

No (If no, please skip to question #5 below)

4. Has the focus on the continuum of care improved assistance to the homeless?

Yes  No  Don't Know

If yes, please describe the specific action(s) that contributed?

Work with this effort on a regional basis.

Economic Development

The State of Nebraska has a goal to strengthen Nebraska communities by targeting serious community development problems capable of being resolved through economic development projects.

1. Have DED programs supported economic development projects in your community during the last 12 months?  Yes  No  Don't Know

If yes, please identify the type of project assisted, ie: business expansion loan, infrastructure improvement to support business development, etc.

Infrastructure assistance for job retention of a private industrial park area. State assistance helped preserve 20 companies and nearly 800 jobs by assisting this area northwest of Sidney to be incorporated into a new municipal water system from a new water well field development. DED's involvement helped the project become a reality and send a positive message to companies struggling to survive after a private water service owner disconnected them from service. The state's assistance also helped us leverage for some federal funding through EDA. Grants covered approximately 25 percent of the total cost.

2. Are you working to identify projects that could be assisted through the use of DED programs?

Yes  No  Don't Know

If yes, please briefly describe the efforts you are undertaking.

Currently working with DED staff on three different major job creation projects. Staff has been outstanding in providing assistance. Most of our projects are self generated and until those projects get to the point from speculation to "probable", then and only then do we start to involve DED staff members.

3. What do you feel are the primary gaps in your efforts to identify or implement successful economic development projects? (funding, staff support, research, local leadership, etc.?)

I feel we have developed an excellent relationship with DED staff members, past and present and they have been exceptional to work with. DED is always financially strapped in their budget, but they get a lot of mileage out of the finances they have to work with. Our biggest challenge is that our community has had many successful economic development job creation projects, thus enhancing our image to get the deal done. Our challenge has been running out of local incentive dollars to continue doing projects, but that is a local issue and not a DED issue. I appreciate the state's mission to consider each project on its individual merits and not restrict fund dollars to regional or community limitations. Jobs are jobs, no matter where they are created in Nebraska.

Accountability to companies and communities who tap into CDBG funds is vitally important. Communities who use their political pull to "force" potentially bad projects into being funded, should be held accountable on future projects. It will help everyone do better projects in the future.

I strongly support having minimum thresholds for wages and benefits to qualify for CDBG funds.

4. Do you have projects underway at this time that require additional support? If yes, please describe identify the project type and assistance needed:

Yes, the projects do need a financial packager designated for western Nebraska. Current DED staff members are willing to help, but everyone (state and western communities) would be best served if this position could be filled closer to the western end of the state. The location of the packager is not a concern, but the qualifications and ability to work with western communities is a priority.

I would like for DED to continue exploring the possibilities of better utilizing development district staff members to contract for services and expertise in assisting communities. We need technicians, not "back slappers".

#### Community Development

The State of Nebraska has a goal to strengthen Nebraska communities by targeting serious community development projects through infrastructure projects.

1. Have DED programs supported infrastructure development projects in your community during the last 12 months?  Yes  No  Don't Know

If yes, please identify the type of project assisted, ie: sewer, water, community center, etc.

2. Are you working to identify projects that could be assisted through the use of DED programs?

Yes  No  Don't Know

If yes, please briefly describe the efforts you are undertaking.

We have a serious drainage problem in the developing area on the east edge of our town and are investigating the steps to take build public infrastructure to address these problems. A public works grant would go a long ways towards providing some cost share in getting projects completed. An engineering study was completed, thanks to a planning grant from DED. Our biggest challenge is meeting income guidelines to qualify for CDBG assistance.

3. What do you feel are the primary gaps in your efforts to identify or implement successful community development projects? (funding, staff support, research, local leadership, etc.?)

Meeting CDBG income guidelines. Nebraska places a great deal of its public infrastructure block grant funding into very small communities that were viable 100 years ago, but have become liabilities in some sense today. At what cost do we continue to pour infrastructure money into these very small communities. Most of them have utility rates not comparable with actual costs of doing business today. Realisticly it would be better to help trade centers grow and prosper so small communities could hang on by being bedroom communities, but politically as we all know what is common sense and what is politically popular are often two different things.

4. Do you have projects underway at this time that require additional support? If yes, please describe identify the project type and assistance needed:

Utilizing existing DED staff members and regional development agencies provides support we need., but replacing the financial packager is needed as explained earlier.

#### Business Development

The State of Nebraska has a goal to strengthen targeted communities with business development projects by providing small business development or job training

1. Have DED programs supported small business development and/or job training assistance programs for businesses in your community during the last 12 months?  Yes  No  Don't Know

If yes, please identify the type of project assisted, ie: job training, business planning, financial assistance, etc.

We received a small tourism initiative grant for the construction of a shooting range with numerous amenities. This project, however, has met with some complications and we may be requesting that the funding be diverted to another similar project effort to build a smaller version of the same project.

2. Are you working to identify projects that could be assisted through the use of DED programs?

Yes  No  Don't Know

If yes, please briefly describe the efforts you are undertaking.

Additional job training funds would be invaluable. Hit and miss efforts over the years and lack of a sustainable state funding source for job training has built a reputation in the business community that Nebraska's commitment to job training funds is minimal or non-existent. We need to establish better working relationships with community colleges, which are already geared to do job training for the business community. Matching funds, if a source can be found, would be a good incentive for companies.

3. What do you feel are the primary gaps in your efforts to identify or implement successful small business development projects? (funding, staff support, research, local leadership, etc.?)

Local staff limitations cause us some challenges to meet all small business needs, so we often prioritize to concentrate on the larger projects and rely on assistance through local partnerships with the Chamber of Commerce and agencies such as Panhandle Area Development District and the REAP organization to assist us in some of these areas.. We also utilize the Nebraska Business Development Center for small business planning. The cooperative effort maximizes the available resources and helps us build sustainable relationships with these agencies.

4. Do you have projects underway at this time that require additional support? If yes, please describe identify the project type and assistance needed:

We always have dozens of projects and inquiries that are always wanting additional help. It takes all of us working together and for the community to have a good grasp of what is available for assistance to get the most mileage we can for business development.

Planning Assistance

The State of Nebraska has a goal to strengthen targeted community development problems by providing communities funds to solve the problems locally through the planning process.

1. Have DED programs supported your community's efforts to identify and plan for your future during the past 12 months?  Yes  No  Don't Know

If yes, please identify the type of project assisted, ie: housing studies, comprehensive plan, tourism planning, infrastructure planning, etc.

Planning grant helped fund an engineering study on drainage area that is impeding development in a key section of our community.

2. Are you working to identify planning projects that could be assisted through the use of DED programs?

Yes  No  Don't Know

If yes, please briefly describe the efforts you are undertaking.

A comprehensive parks system study is also badly needed so we may also apply for planning grant funds for this also.

3. What do you feel are the primary gaps in your efforts to identify or implement successful small business development projects? (funding, staff support, research, local leadership, etc.?)

Local staff limitations, but again that's why we extensively network with regional agencies.

4. Do you have projects underway at this time that require additional support? If yes, please describe identify the project type and assistance needed:

Always. Again being knowledgeable about the assistance and resources available helps us to adapt.

#### Relationship with DED

A priority of DED is increase the effectiveness of State community development programs and services through streamlining and collaborative approaches focusing on customer need.

1. What are your community's, county's or organizations top five priorities for the next year? (please restrict your responses to housing, homeless, community development or economic development priorities)

\* Complete the city's \$10 million water project that will service the community with a quality / quantity source of water and also serve a private industrial park area northwest of Sidney.

\* Embrace Cabela's entry into the public stock era by assisting company any way that we can in its accelerated national development plan and keep as many expansion jobs as possible in Sidney and in Nebraska

\* Get a \$14 million school bond issue adopted for a new middle and senior high school.

\* Fill a major vacant building in downtown area with a company expansion that will enhance downtown traffic

\* Reopen the Haas Hops Processing Manufacturing Plant that closed two years ago with a new manufacturing company.

\* Complete 5 new Interstate 80 business projects

\* Get an affordable housing apartment complex project funded through DED and NIFA funds

\* Construct 50 new single family homes to keep up with our growing economy

\* Work in the beginning stages of opening a new business industrial park site with its first business location and accommodating the park with \$1 million in public infrastructure needs (sewer, water, streets).

\* Assist private venture for constructing a club house at the city owned golf course.

\* Begin implementing local policies and ordinances dealing with drainage issues through "impact fees" assessed to developers.

2. How would you describe your working relationship with DED?

Exceptional. I have great respect for most DED staffers and have worked with some of them for up to 20 years in the development business. They are professional and work their tails off to represent the State of Nebraska. I really appreciate that kind of dedication. Once in awhile there will be a staff member that may hurt the reputation of DED, but I am pleased as to how current management recognizes and is addressing some situations. Most employers have a handful of employees that hurt a company's efforts or reputation, but when management is open minded in listening to concerns, it builds trust in relationships. The brainstorming focus groups organized under Richard Baier's leadership is encouraging because it reaches into the grassroots level to deal with issues, concerns and vision and incorporates those into short and long range planning and programs.

3. How can DED improve its relationship with your organization and responsiveness to your needs?

I would like to see the working relationship between DED and the regional economic development districts continue to strengthen. This strengthening should come in the form of contracting for some of the services and personnel to meet DED needs on a regional basis. Most communities rely on the development districts for a number of services and it only makes sense that stronger relationships be built between DED and the regional districts. It will also maximize the "biggest bang for the buck" spreading scarce resource and personnel dollars further and being able to compensate professionals at a rate that we do not have constant turnover.

Gary Person  
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From: "Gerry Osborn" <gerrywoz@threeriver.net>  
To: <jbolen@neded.org>  
**Subject: Bassett In put meeting**  
Date sent: Sat, 22 May 2004 20:35:33 -0500

Hi Jen -

A couple of comments about the Bassett DED Input meeting. Not well attended but the mix of people were productive.

Two areas that I would like to be sure were emphasized:

1. The lack -or limited amount - of DED support for Entrepreneurs. DED often has big "smoke-stack" focus and as you are aware for being around, we on true 'rural Nebraska' generally have to start small.
2. A serious concern that the guidelines for small cities needs to be assessed and tweaked if possible. I am thinking Fed rules come into play. Nebraska has something nearing 500 total Post offices in the state. (Upper 400's) I quickly scanned and found 30 cities that had populations greater than 4,000 ; which is maybe a meager 7-8% of the total for the entire state. Only Omaha & Lincoln exceed the 50,000 population hurdle, this means that all of the 90+% must be covered by the same 'blanket rules' that apply to Bellevue, Grand Island, Kearney, etc. Jen, from your NCIP experiences, you understand that Potter, Chappell, Ainsworth, Kimball, Cook and on- and on - do not have the same needs or issues that the much larger cities do. Smaller communities would benefit substantially from rules that were less stringent than those currently in place for cities 50,000 category. There is not recognition of this disparity in the existing rules and I offer it should be considered for inclusion, if possible. If we are serious about helping those in the most dire need, then the rules have to be adjusted to assist in that effort.

Cheers  
Gerry Osborn

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June 7, 2004

Jennifer Bolen, Consolidated Plan Coordinator  
Nebraska Department of Economic Development  
P.O. Box 94666  
Lincoln, NE 68509-4666

Dear Jennifer:

Since 1980, Main Street has been helping communities nationwide build the capacity and carry out projects to revitalize their historic or traditional commercial business districts. Based in historic preservation, the Main Street Approach was developed to save historic commercial architecture and the fabric of American communities' built environment, but has become a powerful economic development tool as well. Nationwide, local Main Street programs have facilitated housing development, small business assistance, capacity building, and public infrastructure improvements.

In Nebraska, 18 communities currently participate in the Nebraska Lied Main Street Program. Another 15 communities are either awaiting an assessment from our program or discussing at what level they wish to participate in this time-tested program of historic preservation-based economic development that benefits the entire community. Main Street is a true statewide program with local communities from Beatrice to Scottsbluff, Sidney to Wayne — and several places in-between — participating.

Main Street involves a comprehensive approach to commercial district revitalization involving every segment of a community and every facet of community development, producing tangible and intangible benefits to everyone. Improving economic management, strengthening public participation, and making downtown a fun place to visit are as critical to Main Street's future as recruiting new businesses and rehabilitating buildings. Building on downtown's inherent assets — rich architecture, personal service, traditional values and most of all, a sense of place — the Main Street approach has rekindled entrepreneurship, downtown cooperation and civic concern. It has earned national recognition as a practical strategy appropriately scaled to a community's local resources and conditions. And because it is a locally driven program, all initiative stems from local issues and concerns.

The Main Street program's success is based on a comprehensive strategy of work, tailored to local needs and opportunities, in four areas:

**Design:** Enhancing the physical appearance of the commercial district by rehabilitating historic buildings, encouraging supportive new



### Nebraska Lied Main Street

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#### In Partnership With:

Nebraska Community Foundation

Nebraska Department of  
Economic Development

Nebraska Department of Roads

Nebraska State Historical Society

Nebraska Rural Development  
Commission

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

*The Nebraska Lied Main Street  
Program is dedicated to providing  
Nebraska communities with the  
opportunities to strengthen local  
pride and revitalize historic downtown  
districts by utilizing the Main Street  
Four Point Approach®.*

construction, developing sensitive design management systems, and long-term planning.

**Organization:** Building consensus and cooperation among the many groups and individuals who have a role in the revitalization process.

**Promotion:** Marketing the traditional commercial district's assets to customers, potential investors, new businesses, local citizens and visitors.

**Economic Restructuring:** Strengthening the district's existing economic base while finding ways to expand it to meet new opportunities -- and challenges from outlying development.

Experience has shown time and time again that the Main Street Four Point Approach<sup>®</sup> succeeds only when combined with the following eight principles:

**Comprehensive:** A single project cannot revitalize a downtown or commercial neighborhood. An ongoing series of initiatives is vital to build community support and create lasting progress.

**Incremental:** Small projects make a big difference. They demonstrate that "things are happening" on Main Street and hone the skills and confidence the program will need to tackle more complex problems.

**Self-Help:** Although the National Main Street Center can provide valuable direction and hands-on technical assistance, only local leadership can initiate long-term success by fostering and demonstrating community involvement and commitment to the revitalization effort.

**Public/private partnership:** Every local Main Street program needs the support and expertise of both the public and private sectors. For an effective partnership, each must recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the other.

**Identifying and capitalizing on existing assets:** One of the National Main Street Center's key goals is to help communities recognize and make the best use of their unique offerings. Local assets provide the solid foundation for a successful Main Street initiative.

**Quality:** From storefront design to promotional campaigns to special events, quality must be the main goal.

**Change:** Changing community attitudes and habits is essential to bring about a commercial district renaissance. A carefully planned Main Street

program will help shift public perceptions and practices to support and sustain the revitalization process.

**Action-oriented:** Frequent, visible changes in the look and activities of the commercial district will reinforce the perception of positive change. Small, but dramatic improvements early in the process will remind the community that the revitalization effort is under way.

Main Street communities in Nebraska provide a strong commitment to carrying out a local program that demands a great deal of time and work. Working through a partnership with local city government, public and private downtown revitalization projects can be completed.

There are two levels of active participation in the Nebraska Lied Main Street program--

A Main Street Community is in a growth stage just learning how the Main Street program can be applied. These communities are actively working to build an organization, but may currently be doing so through a local committee of volunteers.

A Certified Main Street Community has an established organization in place with paid professional staff, a board of directors and working committees. Participating communities at the Certified level submit annual work plans outlining goals, objectives and a scope of work, and monthly progress reports outlining the economic impact that Main Street has had on their community. These communities also must meet or be actively working toward meeting the 10-Point National Criteria for Accreditation as a National Main Street Community. In return for this commitment, the Nebraska Lied Main Street program provides individualized technical assistance and the opportunity to compete for financial resources when available. In addition, these communities are also eligible to compete for any national recognition/financial opportunities when available.

Yet with the Main Street structure and commitment in place, both the local communities and the Nebraska Lied Main Street program can only do with what resources there are available. There are several opportunities for high impact projects that cannot be undertaken in local communities because of financial limitations and complex structure of outside funding opportunities.

Below we outline the challenges that face the Main Street communities in which we work. These challenges are not unique to Main Street communities and are based upon the comments we receive from all communities we are in contact with, whether they are a Main Street community or not.

### Challenges for Nebraska Main Street Communities

- Weak local ability to apply for and manage a CDBG project. Some local governments in Main Street communities do not have staff available to apply for and manage a CDBG-funded project even though the community does qualify and there are eligible projects.
- Lack of understanding of the eligibility qualifications. Some communities make assumptions or do not understand the eligibility requirements.
- Lack of resources to develop organizational capacity not only for the Main Street organization, but all other community development organizations serving the local population that may help with community development activities in the central business or Main Street district.
- Lack of local resources to develop existing empty storefronts and upper stories in the central business or Main Street district. Property owners do not have the sole financial means to carry out rehabilitation projects that could provide jobs, businesses, and expanded housing opportunities for the community.
- Lack of local resources to improve infrastructure to meet accessibility requirements in the central business or Main Street district.
- Lack of local resources to expand the mix of housing opportunities in the community to include housing in downtown buildings, in part because of accessibility issues.
- The need for retail training programs for Main Street business owners to help reduce the risk of failure, to keep jobs and businesses in the community, and to help expansion.
- Money available to develop a plan that may include Main Street redevelopment, but a lack of money available to carry out activities identified in the plan.
- Lack of local resources for façade improvements to buildings in the central business or Main Street district. A negative physical image affects the potential for a community to recruit businesses, promote tourism, and increase population.


Opportunities for using CDBG in the communities served by the Nebraska Lied Main Street program centers around strengthening the partnership between the Nebraska Lied Main Street Program and the Nebraska Department of Economic Development.

Through DED field and team staff, and the partners and staff of the Nebraska Lied Main Street program, we can provide more comprehensive technical assistance to communities to build community capacity for planning and carrying

out CDBG projects such as housing, retail development, and building rehab in the central business or Main Street district. Without a stronger partnership in this realm, many potential community or economic development projects have fallen and will continue to fall through the cracks.

We look forward to having our comments included in the draft of the Consolidated Plan and stand ready to do our part to help people in all Nebraska communities to deal with housing, homelessness, community development and other quality of life issues.

Sincerely,



J.L. Schmidt, Director  
Nebraska Lied Main Street Program

cc: file

eac

The Norfolk

&  
Hope  
House

RESCUE  
Mission

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The Columbus

"The Harbor  
of Hope"

RESCUE  
Mission

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*Helping the Hurting and the Homeless in the Name of Jesus Christ*

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JUN 14 2004

DEPT. ECONOMIC DEV.

June 8, 2004

Jennifer Bolen  
Nebraska Department of Economic Development  
PO Box 94666  
Lincoln NE 68509

RE: Report on Public Input Meetings

Dear Ms. Bolen,

I was recently given a copy of the NENEDD Summary to the Nebraska Department of Economic Development of Public Input Meetings on Five Year Consolidated Plan. It contains a cover letter from Renay Robison-Scheer to Jennifer Bolen dated June 4, 2004.

I am one of the 60 people who participated in the public input meetings. I wanted to write a letter to accompany the report, but was unable to because of other commitments. As I read the summary, I became convinced that my letter was necessary.

Page 4 of the Summary concerns **The Homeless Priority for DED**. In the public input meeting held in Norfolk, in response to the first question, I related a story of a typical person with whom I have contact.

I met "George" at the Norfolk Rescue Mission on a Saturday about 5:00 PM. He recognized me from a time in the late '80's - early '90's when I had ministered to him in Omaha. He wanted to know if he could eat supper with us at the Mission. I assured him he could and asked him what brought him to Norfolk. He said he came to look for a job. So, I asked him where he had applied today? He responded that because it was the weekend, he hadn't put in any job applications today. When asked about yesterday (Friday), he responded that he hadn't applied anywhere on Friday either. I asked, "How about Thursday?" He told me of one place where he had applied on Thursday. "And on Wednesday, Tuesday, and Monday? How many applications did you put in on those days?" He said he hadn't put in any applications on those days either. I told George, "I hate to be the one to tell you such bad news, but the fact is your not looking for a job. You're really just waiting for someone to hand you a job."

Then I said, "Since you're not staying at the Mission, where are you staying?" He described a house nearby. I asked him how the bills were being paid? He responded, "Welfare." "And the utilities?" I asked. "They're included. Welfare pays for them too." I continued, "How about your food?" He told me that he

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receives Food Stamps. I commented that I could understand why he expected someone to hand him a job - it was because he's handed everything else.

**Is "George" better off now than 5 years ago?** Our "welfare program" has robbed him of any incentive he might have had to go out and actually look for a job. Has "the continuum of housing opportunities and supportive services for homeless persons plus increased educational outreach and prevention activities" made any difference in George's life? I don't think so.

In answering the second question on Page 4, I commented that the tremendous increase we've seen in homelessness has not been just among people moving into our area to find jobs, but among the native residents of northeastern Nebraska. In fact, the people moving into our area to find jobs and get a new start are the easy ones with which to work. Most of the people moving into our area are unaware of the "homeless programs." They just get jobs and get on with life. It's the native Nebraskans who have the "entitlement mentality" and have little incentive to find jobs. It's the 20- and 30-some-year-old native Nebraskans who are the "headaches."

My response to the third question concerned that most of the government money being spent was not combating homelessness, but near-homelessness. The agencies are paying rents, mortgages, utility costs, whatever it takes to keep the people from becoming homeless. It is my contention that this easing of circumstances and mitigating consequences is counter-productive to really helping the people. The people are not actually improving - it's just that they're not becoming homeless. I have seen people helped and helped and helped while they learned nothing, nothing, nothing. It was the consequences that finally got their attention. Consequences are a great teacher! To mitigate consequences is to mute the teacher. I would liken this to a schoolteacher lowering her standards so more people would pass. Nobody would learn any more, but fewer would flunk.

Also, most homeless persons are referred to as needing "emergency services" - as if their homelessness was caused by an emergency. I believe this is wrong! It is my experience that most (99%) homeless people are homeless because it's a natural consequence of their lifestyles. For example, I observe four commonalities among the homeless:

1. They're unemployed.
2. They're unchurched.
3. They're alcohol & drug users.
4. They're estranged from their families.

Of these, I view one as a cause (unchurched) and three as symptoms. Most programs address only the symptoms.

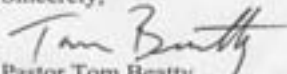
The answer to the fourth question on Page 4 seems to imply that the perception is false. I have observed many disability checks, welfare checks, and food stamps go to purchase alcohol and drugs and toward gambling. It's sad how much government money is wasted in this way.

My answers to the fifth question on Page 4 concerned funding agencies needing to be more accountable. The rest of what I said is important. Without accountability, irresponsibility is promoted. If people are not actually looking for employment (as evidenced by putting in verifiable job applications), why should they be subsidized with unemployment checks, welfare

checks, food stamps, subsidized rent, etc.? If people are wearing freaky haircuts, body piercings, torn clothes, etc. while looking for a job, are they really trying to get hired, or are they just going through the motions and wasting peoples' time? Why should the taxpayers subsidize that?

Most of the answers to the fifth question - except the ones I gave - just want more money. I wonder if this is reflective of the fact that most, if not all, the others in attendance were receiving some sort of government-funded income? When will they ever learn? Throwing more money at the problem isn't the solution.

Sincerely,

  
Pastor Tom Beatty  
Norfolk & Columbus Rescue Missions  
POB 2532  
Norfolk NE 68702  
402-750-2686

c: Renay Robison-Scheer

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Subject: **public input**  
Date sent: **Fri, 4 Jun 2004 11:20:16 -0500**  
From: **"Rick Meyer" <rick.meyer@pinnbank.com>**  
To: **<jbolen@neded.org>**

I'm writing as a resident of Lincoln who owns a mobile home park in central Nebraska. My comments will be centered on a bill (HR-23) signed by President Bush last December. This bill which is called the Tornado Shelter Act, provides for the opportunity to make CBDG funds eligible to build tornado shelters in rural areas with low/moderate income residents.

After the weather events of the last few weekends ( we had 4 tornados within 3 miles of the park), I can see how a case can be made to make this funding a priority in the upcoming 5 year plan. It was interesting that as I was cleaning up from the storms last weekend, several residents commented about their fear of tornados and didn't know where to go when the sirens went off. Right now, many of them drive to the local Wal-Mart for safety because there is no shelter in town at all. They told me that last weekend Wal-Mart was not allowing anyone in because the storm was to close. These residents were then stranded in the parking lot with no idea of where to go. Many of our residents are lower income Latino citizens and communication can be difficult for them.

In our park we have a large parcel of land that would be available to build a shelter large enough for the residents of the 80 trailers there as well as residents in the community who may need shelter. Due to an issue of safety and even life or death, I believe serious consideration should be made to make CBDG funds available for the eligible use of tornado shelters for those mobile parks that qualify. The recently signed bill was designed to head off a possible tornado catastrophe and loss of life. I urge you to prioritize the use of these funds for those who desire to use them. I believe we should be proactive with this new bill and not reactive after a disaster happens. Thank You for your consideration. If you need any additional details of HR-23 I would be happy to provide them.  
Sincerely, R