

Citizen Participation Plan

Gloucester County, New Jersey (Revised July 2020)

INTRODUCTION

This Citizens Participation Plan has been developed in accordance with the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) regulations (24 CFR 91.105) and the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, as amended. In summary, the County of Gloucester desires to provide opportunity for the citizens of the County to submit their views regarding Housing and Community Development needs within the County. In this regard, the County proposes to provide sufficient information to the citizens, which will enable them to participate to the fullest extent in the development of the Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plans, and program evaluation reports. This Plan is designed to provide a uniform procedure for all aspects of citizen participation that equals or exceeds the requirements set forth in the Consolidated Plan regulations (24 CFR 91).

DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

Each Program Year, the County will provide citizens with adequate information concerning the amount of funds expected to be available for Community Development, Housing, and Economic Development activities. This information will be made available to the public thirty days prior to its submission to the US Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) and will be in the form of the Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plans. Each year, the County will also provide citizens with adequate information concerning the funds expended in the previous Program Year. This information will be made available through the Consolidated Plan Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER) and will be available to the public for comment fifteen days prior to its submission to HUD. Furthermore, the Consolidated Plan, the Annual Action Plan and the CAPER will contain maps and project summaries so as to afford citizens with the maximum opportunity to understand all proposed and completed activities. The Consolidated Plan and the Annual Action Plan will be available on the County's website, during the Public Hearing, at the Gloucester County Planning Division, Office of Housing and Community Development during the thirty-day comment period. All facilities that house the Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plan will be ADA accessible. The CAPER will also be available on the County website, at the Gloucester County Office of Housing and Community Development, Planning Division during the fifteen-day comment period. When notified in advance, the County will identify and meet the needs of non-English speaking and special needs citizens as part of the Public Participation process. Prior to submission of the Consolidated Plan, the Annual Action Plan and the CAPER, the County will consider any comments and views received from the Public Participation process.

In accordance with applicable legislation and regulations, the County will make information available to the Public in its Consolidated Plan, which includes the following:

- a. The proposed amount of funds to be used for activities benefiting low and moderate income persons;
- b. The plan for minimizing displacement of persons as a result of Community Development Block Grant or HOME funded activities; and

- c. A plan to assist persons actually displaced by Community Development Block Grant or HOME activities, including the types of assistance that may be provided in the event displacement does occur.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

The County of Gloucester conducts Public Hearings on the Consolidated Plan and the Annual Action Plan each year. At least two Public Hearings will be held to obtain the views of citizens and organizations' regarding the County's proposed activities. In order to provide reasonable access to citizens throughout the County, the Public Hearing will be held in different locations accessible to the general public, including citizens with mobility impairments. To further accommodate citizens' schedules, one Hearing will be held between the hours of 9:00 AM and 4:30 PM, and the other Hearings will be held after 5:00 PM.

If the County intends to fund a project with CDBG or HOME funds that will result in displacement, the County will explain its responsibility to replace all occupied and vacant habitable low and moderate-income dwelling units that may be demolished or converted to another use with the use of Community Development Block Grant or HOME funds. The County's explanation will include the following:

- a. When replacement will take place as a result of demolition/conversion;
- b. Location of replacement units within the applicant's jurisdiction;
- c. The replacement units must be of sufficient size to house at least the same number of occupants that could have been housed in the units demolished/converted; and
- d. The replacement units must be provided in standard condition.

The County will also explain that prior to obligating or expending funds that will result in the demolition or conversion of low and moderate-income housing units; it will publicize and provide an opportunity for citizen comment on the following:

- a. A description of the proposed demolition/conversion activity;
- b. The general location and the number of units by size that will be demolished/converted;
- c. A time schedule for the start and completion of demolition/conversion;
- d. The general location and number of units by size that will be provided as replacement units; and
- e. The source of funding and a time schedule for the provision of replacement units.

Prior to adoption of the Consolidated Plan or the Annual Action Plan, the Board of Chosen Freeholders will consider comments of citizens. This will precede a regular meeting of the Board of Chosen Freeholders, which will then consider Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plan, or Substantial Amendment by resolution.

NOTICES

In order to ensure adequate notification to County citizens of the Public Hearing process, at least five days prior to each Hearing, a Notice will be published in the legal section of a newspaper of general circulation in the County. At the present time, the newspaper of record is the South Jersey Times. The Notice will provide the following:

- a. The date, time and location of the Public Hearing;
- b. The amount of funds available, including the grant and program income;

- c. The range of activities which may be undertaken with CDBG and HOME Investment Partnership funds;
- d. The amount of CDBG and HOME Investment Partnership funds proposed to benefit low and moderate-income persons;
- e. An identification of activities that could result in displacement. The notice also will state that the applicant is responsible for replacing all low and moderate income housing units that may be demolished or converted. The types and levels of assistance the applicant plans to make available to persons displaced by CDBG or HOME funded activities, even if no displacement is expected to occur, this must be explained at the Public Hearing; and
- f. A statement that citizens may also comment on the County's prior use of CDBG or HOME funds.

The Notice will also provide information on procedures and timing to be followed by the County in the development and approval of the Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plan or Substantial Amendment. When deemed necessary and appropriate, the County will prepare a schedule for Public Hearings. This schedule will be revised and updated on an annual basis prior to the Public Hearings.

The Office of Housing and Community Development Director may also provide the above referenced schedules to groups and organizations likely to represent citizens who may be affected by the Plans.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR CONDUCTING HEARINGS/MEETINGS

The Director of the Board of Chosen Freeholders of the County shall have the responsibility of calling meetings and hearings with citizens likely to be affected by the Community Development Block Grant and HOME Investment Partnership. The Freeholder Director may delegate assignments to others. Procedures shall also be developed for meetings and hearings and for moderating such meetings either directly or through the County's Office of Housing and Community Development Director.

RESPONSE TO PROPOSALS, QUESTIONS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS SUBMITTED BY CITIZENS

The County will provide timely response to all written proposals and complaints received at Public Hearings or forwarded directly to the County. The County will respond to complaints or proposals within fifteen working days from the date of receipt. With regard to proposals for use of Community Development Block Grant and HOME funds, the County will make every effort to respond prior to the meeting of the County to consider adoption of the Consolidated Plan or the Annual Action Plan.

AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSOLIDATED PLAN OR THE ANNUAL ACTION PLAN

If at any time during the Program Year, the County deems it necessary to amend its Consolidated Plan or the Annual Action Plan, it will provide reasonable notice of said amendments through the notification procedures described in the Notices section above, and will conduct one Public Hearing to provide opportunity for citizens' comment on any proposed changes. Citizens' comments shall be considered prior to approval of the amendment of the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) regulations (24 CFR 91) provide for citizen participation and HUD field office notification for the following types of changes:

- a. An amendment to the Annual Action Plan, which includes "substantial Changes." An amendment will be considered a "substantial change" whenever the County:
 1. Eliminates an activity described in the a previous Annual Action Plan;
 2. Adds an activity not previously described in the Annual Action Plan;
 3. Substantially changes the purpose, scope, location, or beneficiaries of an activity from a previously-approved Action Plan; or
 4. Increases or reduces the budget of an activity described in a previous Annual Action Plan by more than 20% of the original budget.
- b. Major amendments to the Consolidated Plan shall include, but not limited to the following:
 1. Any reduction or increase in any goals for activities identified in the Plan;
 2. The elimination of a goal identified in the Plan;
 3. The addition of a new goal not previously identified in the Plan;
 4. Proposals for revisions to general locations for activities identified in the Plan;
 5. If there is a significant change in or new data becomes available regarding or affecting activities identified in the Plan.

Copies of the modified Consolidated Plan or the Annual Action Plan will be made available to the Public through the procedures described above, regarding dissemination of information, and will be submitted to (HUD). Only one Public Hearing will be required when considering revisions and/ or amendments to the Consolidated Plan or the Annual Action Plan.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PERFORMANCE

The Community Development regulations that govern the Consolidated Planning process (24 CFR 91) require that the County submit a "Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER), sixty days after the end of the Program Year. Citizens will be notified, through the newspaper of general circulation, of the availability of the CAPER and their opportunity to comment on the report. Copies of the CAPER will be available to citizens on the County website, at the offices of the Gloucester County Office of Housing & Community Development. The comment period will be fifteen (15) days. A summary of comments or views shall be attached to the CAPER and submitted to HUD.

AVAILABILITY OF PROGRAM AND RELATED INFORMATION

The County intends to provide for the maximum public access to information regarding the Community Development Block Grant and HOME activities. The County will, however, honor confidentiality of records relating to individual applications for financial assistance for residential and commercial properties and other matters of a confidential nature. The Office of Housing and Community Development will maintain the official file containing the following types of data:

- a. Mailing and promotional material related to the citizen participation process
- b. Records of public hearings
- c. Key documents, including prior applications, performance reports, and Environmental Review Records, etc.
- d. Copies of regulations and policy statements issued by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES)

In accordance with the 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) and in similar emergency circumstances where social distancing is necessary, in-person public hearings are not required. The County will make a good faith effort to provide an opportunity for the public to participate using whatever means are available, including electronic communications and virtual meetings. The County may meet public hearing requirements with virtual public hearings if: 1) national/local health authorities recommend social distancing and limiting public gatherings for public health reasons; and 2) virtual hearings provide reasonable notification and access for citizens in accordance with the grantee's certifications, timely responses from local officials to all citizen questions and issues, and public access to all questions and responses. In addition, the County may reduce the comment period for any Consolidated Plan, Action Plan or Substantial Amendment to five (5) days.

MODIFICATIONS TO THE PLAN

The Board of Chosen Freeholders of the County may modify this Citizens Participation Plan from time to time, provided such provisions are consistent with Federal law, regulations, and administrative requirements covering the citizen participation process for the Community Development Block Grant and HOME Program. The Board of Chosen Freeholders shall make modifications that are made by the County available for public review, inspection, and comment prior to adoption. Public Notice of the proposed revisions to this Plan will be published in accordance with the notification procedures made a part of this Plan. Prior to adopting a revision to this Plan, a Public Hearing will be held to explain the purpose and scope of the revision and to receive comments and questions from the Public. The Board of Chosen Freeholders prior to adoption will consider said comments and questions.