

**CITY OF GREAT FALLS CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PLAN**  
for COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CDBG)  
and HOME INVESTMENT PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM (HOME)  
UPDATED February 2025

## **PURPOSE**

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The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires the City of Great Falls to develop and follow a Citizen Participation Plan as a condition of receiving funds under the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) as outlined in Section 24 of the Code of Federal Regulations Part 91.105. The Plan must describe the local annual process as well as address key elements mandated by HUD. The City's program year begins October 1 and ends September 30.

The Citizen Participation Plan contains the City of Great Falls' policies and procedures for involving the community in:

- The development of the Citizen Participation Plan, Annual Action Plan and the Consolidated Plan;
- The review of the Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER); and
- Any substantial amendments to the Consolidated Plan.

The Citizen Participation Plan will assure that all residents are afforded adequate opportunities to articulate needs, express preferences about proposed activities, assist in the selection of priorities, and have questions or complaints answered in a timely and responsive manner.

## **KEY ELEMENTS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION**

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### **Encouragement of Citizen Participation**

The City will provide for and encourage citizen participation, emphasizing the involvement of low to moderate income residents in areas where housing and community development funds may be spent, particularly those in slum and blighted areas. The City will also inform and offer opportunities for comment to residents of low to moderate income neighborhoods (neighborhoods having 51% or higher low to moderate income populations). The City will encourage the participation of public/assisted housing residents being served by the Great Falls Housing Authority and Opportunities, Inc.

The City will make reasonable efforts to consult with other public, private, and non-profit agencies that provide housing, health service, and social services. In particular, agencies to be consulted will be those that focus on service to children/families with children, elderly persons, racial/ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, female heads of household, non-English speaking persons, and other persons in need of services. The City will encourage input and solicit comments from Neighborhood Councils and will notify the Councils about public hearings related to development of the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan. The city will encourage community input for the Annual Action Plan through a minimum of two public hearings. Additionally, during the development of the 5-year Consolidated Plan, the City will

utilize community surveys, focus groups, and other public forums as methods of obtaining community input and assessing community needs. Policies involving access to public meetings and information are outlined in following sections of this Plan.

When preparing the portions of the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan regarding lead-based paint hazards, the City will consult with the Great Falls Housing Authority certified lead-based paint risk assessor to define what specific activities will be undertaken to mitigate and abate lead-based paint in housing units subsidized to be affordable for low to moderate income households. Activities required for lead-based paint hazards will also be addressed in non-profit facilities which receive CDBG grant funds as sub-recipients of the City where children spend the amount of time which meets the minimum threshold criteria.

The City Commission is the final citizen policy body that reviews and takes action on the Citizen Participation Plan, Annual Action Plan, and Consolidated Plan. After receipt and consideration of public comments, the City Commission votes on these Plans. During all City Commission meetings, citizens have the opportunity to provide public comment.

#### **Access to Meetings**

The City will afford adequate, timely notification so that residents can attend local meetings and public forums and be involved in decision making at various stages of the program. The City will provide reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities to all public hearings and meetings. Reasonable accommodations include but are not limited to holding meetings in handicapped accessible buildings and providing for language interpreters, when requested.

#### **Access to Information**

The City will provide citizens, public agencies, and other interested parties with reasonable and timely access to information and records relating to the Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plan and all of their components, and the City's planned use of financial assistance received under the relevant federal programs during the upcoming program year. The public will have the opportunity to receive information, review and submit comments on any proposed submission, including the Consolidated Plan adoption by the City Commission and any plan amendments. Information on the required comment period related to any proposed submission amendments, or adoption of the Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plan will be available to the public.

Information will also be available on the range of programs and the amount of funding assistance the City expects to receive proposed to benefit low to moderate income residents. These groups will have access to the City's plans to minimize displacement of residents and businesses and assist those displaced because of these activities. The City will also provide citizens, public agencies, and other interested parties with reasonable and timely access to information and records relating to all processes associated with the CAPER.

Information and public records will be available during regular business hours in the **City Finance Department**. Special accommodations will be available for persons with disabilities and/or limited English proficiency upon request and within reason, including alternative formats of distribution and/or translated versions of the proposed document.

The final version of the current Consolidated Plan and current Annual Action Plan will be available on the City's website on an ongoing basis.

### **Technical Assistance**

The City will provide appropriate technical assistance to all groups that request assistance in developing proposals for financial assistance under any of the programs covered by the Consolidated Plan.

### **Public Hearings**

The City Commission will hold at least two public hearings during each program year cycle to obtain citizens' opinions.

The hearings must be conveniently timed for people who are likely to benefit from program funds. The hearings must be accessible to people with disabilities, and adequately publicized with sufficient information about the subject of the hearing to encourage informed comment. Material presented at the public hearings will be made available in electronic format on the City's website. The public hearings will occur on a weekday evening in the Civic Center, which is centrally located, easily accessible with adequate parking, and handicap accessible. Individuals with specific special needs should contact the City before public hearing dates to make arrangements if they wish to attend.

The first public hearing will give citizens the opportunity to comment and provide input on the following:

- Any housing and non-housing community development needs they have identified
- Development of proposed activities
- How funding proposals may meet community development needs in Great Falls
- Performance of the City in administering and distributing federal funds

The second public hearing will offer the opportunity for the citizens to comment on the following:

- Adoption of the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan
- Use of federal funds
- Performance of the administration and implementation of funded projects

Notification to the public will be published at a minimum 14 days in advance of all public hearings. This will include publishing at least two legal notices not less than six days apart in a publication designated by the City of Great Falls for legal notices. In addition, a press release will be sent out to local media, and the information will be posted on the City's website and social media outlets. Direct emails will be sent

to all individuals, agencies, and government departments which have expressed an interest in or have received CDBG or HOME grant funds in previous years.

### **Publication of the Consolidated Plan/Annual Action Plan/CAPER**

The City will publish its proposed Consolidated Plan/Annual Action Plan/CAPER documents so that affected residents have sufficient opportunity to review them and provide comments. The requirement for publishing will be met by making copies of the proposed plan available at the Great Falls Public Library, the **City's Finance Office**, and on the City's website. The City will provide a reasonable number of free copies of the Consolidated Plan/Annual Action Plan/CAPER to citizens and groups upon request.

### **Comments**

A period of not less than 30 days will be provided to the public for review and comment on the proposed Consolidated Plan and/or Annual Action Plan prior to submission to HUD unless HUD has allowed for a shortened comment period. A period of no less than 15 days will be provided to the public for review and comment on the CAPER prior to submission to HUD. Notices of periods for public comment and review will be published in a publication designated by the City of Great Falls for legal notices and on the City's website and social media platforms. Citizens may comment on the adoption of the Citizen Participation Plan every five years or any time the Citizen Participation Plan has substantial revisions or has been re-written. Prior to adopting the Citizen Participation Plan, the City will distribute the plan for review and comment for a 15-day period.

The City will consider any comments or views of residents, public agencies, units of general local government, and other interested parties concerning the Consolidated Plan and/or Annual Action Plan, any amendments to these plans, and the CAPER and attach a summary of such comments to the final submissions. Comments can be submitted to the **Finance Department** via written submission, phone, email, or oral comment at public hearings. The Montana Relay number will be included in notifications to facilitate comments from citizens who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, or have speech disabilities.

### **Complaints and Grievances**

The City will consider any complaints and grievances from citizens, agencies, units of general local government, or other interested parties concerning the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan, any amendments to these plans, and the CAPER. Complaints and grievances can be submitted to the **Finance Department** via written submission, phone, email, or oral comment at public hearings. The Montana Relay number will be included in notifications to facilitate complaints and grievances from citizens who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, or have speech disabilities.

The **Finance Department** will address any complaints and grievances with written responses within 15 working days, where practical. Depending on the nature of the complaint and grievance, staff may refer the issue to the City Manager or the City Commission if the response from staff is unsatisfactory to the complainant. As appropriate, a summary of responses will be attached to the final submissions of the Consolidated Plan, Consolidated Plan amendments, Annual Action Plan, and CAPER.

### **Non-English Speaking Residents**

Special accommodations will be available for persons with limited English proficiency upon request and within reason, including translated versions of proposed documents and translation services for non-English speaking residents at public hearings.

### **Substantial Amendments**

Substantial changes in the City's planned or actual program activities will require an amendment to the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan. The following criteria determines what constitutes a substantial change and governs Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan amendments:

- Change in allocation priorities of more than 20%
- Carrying out new program activities that do not meet the goals identified in the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan
- Change in purpose or scope of activities identified in the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan

The City will provide a notice, published twice, in a publication designated by the City of Great Falls for legal notices and have notifications on the City's website. The City will also make available any substantial amendments to the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan for citizen comment for a 30-day period, unless HUD has allowed for a shortened comment period.

### **Minor Amendment**

Minor amendments represent any changes to the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan that do not qualify as "substantial amendments." Minor amendments require the signature of the Finance Director or Deputy Director but do not require public notice of 30 days or City Commission approval.

## **SOLICITATION OF CITIZEN COMMENTS ON THE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PLAN**

Prior to the adoption of the Citizen Participation Plan and approval by the City Commission, a notice will be published twice in a publication designated by the City of Great Falls for legal notices. Notices of the Citizen Participation Plan and/or any amendments to this Plan will be available for a 15-day comment period and will designate the sites where a citizen may obtain a copy of the Plan. These sites will include the City's website and the City Finance Department. State relay 711 and reasonable accommodations are available upon request.

The City will consider all written and oral comments or views of residents received during the public comment period. The final Plan will include a summary of public comments and a summary of any comments not accepted and the reasons therefore.

## **SOLICITATION OF CITIZEN COMMENTS IN PREPARING THE CONSOLIDATED PLAN OR THE ANNUAL ACTION PLAN**

The City will contact local affordable housing and public service agencies, the Great Falls Housing Authority and the Neighborhood Councils to obtain information and comments to make citizens aware of the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan process. The City will make reasonable efforts to consult with other public, private and non-profit agencies that provide housing, health service, and social services. In particular, agencies to be consulted will be those that focus on service to children/families with children, elderly persons, racial/ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, female heads of household, non-English speaking persons, and other persons in need of services. State relay 711 and reasonable accommodations are available upon request.

The proposed Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan will be available to all citizens via the City's website, the Great Falls Public Library, and the **City Finance Department**. Citizens will be informed about the availability of the proposed Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan by notifications on the City's website, published notices in a publication designated by the City of Great Falls for legal notices, and emailed notices to a wide variety of public service agencies. Notification will describe the availability of the Plan and the 30-day period to receive public comment, unless HUD has allowed for a shortened comment period.

The City Commission will conduct at least two public hearings requesting input from citizens and representatives of low to moderate income level people on the needs of the community, including but not limited to housing, community development, infrastructure, economic development and homeless assistance.

The City will provide a reasonable number of free copies of the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan to citizens and groups upon request. Electronic copies will be made available for download from the City's website. All information and public records will be available during regular business hours in the **City's Finance Department**. Special arrangements will be available to accommodate access to information for persons with disabilities and/or limited English proficiency upon request and within reason, including alternative formats for important documents associated with the public participation process.

### **EXPEDITED CITIZEN PARTICIPATION OPTIONS**

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If, for any reason, HUD has allowed for an expedited Citizen Participation process the City maintains the right to utilize those waivers without needing to amend the approved Citizen Participation Plan. This includes, but is not limited to, virtual hearing options, expedited public comment processes, and any other waivers that may be necessary and granted by HUD. If virtual hearings are used, real-time responses and accommodation for persons with disabilities and/or with limited English proficiency will be made available to the greatest extent possible.