

City of Great Falls, Montana Citizen Participation Plan

June 1, 2020 Update & Revisions (COVID-19 Update)

The Citizen Participation Plan has been revised on June 1, 2020 to:

- Include virtual hearings as an allowed method for citizen participation when necessary for public health reasons;
- Provide a 5-day notice/comment period for proposed amendments necessary to expedite and facilitate the use of funds to prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus.
- Allow for minor edits that do not change current citizen participation policies. Please be advised that if virtual hearings are used, real-time responses and accommodations for persons with disabilities and/or with limited English proficiency will be made available to the greatest extent possible;
- Include provisions relative to the Consolidated Planning process and public participation waivers made available under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act;
- Include provisions related to funding from the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program and other applicable U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development funding made available under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act;

City of Great Falls, Montana
Citizen Participation Plan for the
Consolidated Plan and
Consolidated Annual Performance Evaluation Report
UPDATED June 1, 2020

PURPOSE OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPING THE CONSOLIDATED PLAN AND CONSOLIDATED ANNUAL PERFORMANCE EVALUATION REPORT

The City of Great Falls (City) must develop a Consolidated Plan to be eligible to receive Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and HOME Investment Partnership Program (HOME) federal grant funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. A key component in creating the Consolidated Plan is citizen participation in all steps of the planning development process. Additionally, citizen participation is an integral component of the Consolidated Annual Performance Evaluation Report (CAPER) which is also required by HUD to receive federal grant funds. To ensure citizens in Great Falls have the opportunity to take part in creating the Consolidated Plan, the Annual Action Plan and the CAPER, the City has developed and commits to implement the following elements of the Citizen Participation Plan.

THE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PLAN

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 the Great Falls Housing Authority public/assisted housing residents and Opportunities, Inc. assisted housing residents in Great Falls.

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 information from each of the nine Neighborhood Councils and will notify the Councils about public hearings, the Consolidated Plan or the Annual Action Plan development process and solicit comments. The City will encourage community input through surveys, focus groups, and public meetings.

When preparing the portion of the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan regarding lead-based paint hazards, the City will consult with the City and Great Falls Housing Authority certified lead-based paint risk assessors 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.

Meetings and Public Hearings: The City will provide notification of meetings two weeks in advance so all citizens can attend public hearings. Notice shall be provided to the public via email, mail, broadcast or cable media, or social media, and will also be published twice in the publication designated by the City of Great Falls for legal notices prior to any hearing date.

***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. Also, the virtual hearing method will only be used in lieu of an in-person hearing if national or local health authorities recommend social distancing and limit public gatherings for public health reasons.**

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 its components, and the City's planned use of financial assistance received under the relevant federal programs during the upcoming year. The public will have the opportunity to receive information, review and submit comments on any proposed HUD submission, including the Consolidated Plan adopted by the City Commissioners and any plan amendments.

Information will also be available on the range of programs, the amount of assistance the City expects to receive, the amount of funds available and the estimated amount 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.

The final version of the current Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plan, CAPER, and Annual Community Assessment will be available on the City 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. An annual application workshop will be held to provide applicants with information on how to complete application forms. Individuals with specific special needs should contact the City one week before workshop date to make arrangements if they wish to attend.

Public Hearings: The City will provide multiple opportunities to obtain citizens opinions. The City program year begins July 1 and ends June 30. Public hearings will address and respond to proposals and comments on:

1. Grant Policies
2. Housing and community development needs
3. Development of proposed activities
4. Review of proposed uses for funding
5. Review of program performance

The City will hold public hearings that are conveniently timed for people who are likely to benefit from program funds, 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 hearing will be made available in electronic format on the City's webpage. Individuals with specific special needs should contact the City one week before public hearing dates to make arrangements if they wish to attend.

Throughout the year, citizens may attend City Commission meetings and public hearings to provide input as to the distribution of federal funds into the City. There will be one formal public hearing conducted by the City Commission annually. The 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
- How funding proposals may meet community development needs in Great Falls
- Performance of the City in administering and distributing federal funds
- Citizens may comment on the adoption of the Citizens 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 Commission will offer two additional opportunities for the citizens to comment on the following:

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

***For projects utilizing CDBG funding under Program Year (PY) 2019 and 2020, and the CARES Act CDBG-CV funding, the City of Great Falls may provide a 5-day notice/comment period for proposed amendments necessary to expedite and facilitate the use of funds to prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus.**

Timely Response: The City will consider any comments or views of 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. Comments can be submitted to the Planning & Community Development Department (PCD) via written submission, phone, or email, or oral comment at public hearings. The Montana Relay number will be included in notifications to facilitate deaf, hard-of-hearing, and people with speech disabilities the ability to submit comments via phone. The PCD Department will address any complaints with written responses to written complaints within 15 working days, where practical. Depending on the nature of the complaint, 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, an attachment of summary of comments and responses to complaints to the final submission of the Consolidated Plan, Consolidated Plan amendments, Annual Action Plan and the CAPER will occur.

Non-English Speaking Residents: The City will provide translation services for non-English speaking residents at public hearings upon request and within reason.

Substantial Amendments: Substantial changes in the City's Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan will require a Substantial Amendment. The following criterion determines substantial change and governs Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan amendments:

1. Change in allocation priorities or method of distribution
2. Carrying out new activities, not identified in the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan
3. Change in purpose, scope, location or beneficiaries 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 internet site. 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.

*The CARES Act has made available additional funding through the Community Development Block Grant Coronavirus (CDBG-CV) program. The CARES Act adds additional flexibility for both the CDBG-CV grant and, in some cases, for the annual Program Year 2019 and 2020 CDBG grants due to hardship associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The public comment period is reduced to not less than 5 days, grantees may use virtual public hearings when necessary for public health reasons, the public services cap is suspended during the emergency, and states and local governments may reimburse costs of eligible activities incurred for pandemic response regardless of the date.

In addition, the CARES Act authorizes the Secretary to grant waivers and alternative requirements of statutes and regulations the Secretary administers in connection with the use of CDBG-CV funds and Program Year PY 2019 and 2020 CDBG funds (except for

requirements related to fair housing, nondiscrimination, labor standards, and the environment). Waivers and alternative requirements can be granted when necessary to expedite and facilitate the use of funds to prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus.

These revisions do not change current citizen participation policies but have been modified to allow for necessary expedited actions during times of declared disaster or emergencies.

Minor Amendment: Minor amendments represents any changes to the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan that do not qualify as “substantial amendments.” Minor amendments require the signature of the Planning and Community Development Director or Deputy Director, but do not require public notice of 30 days or City Commission approval.

Consolidated Annual Performance Evaluation Report: The Proposed CAPER will be available to all citizens for review and comment on the City internet site and at the City Planning & Community Development Department for a 15 day comment period. Notice will also be published in a publication designated by the City of Great Falls for legal notices. All comments received regarding the CAPER will be considered and a summary of all comments will be attached to the report. The final version of the current CAPER will be available on the City website on an ongoing basis.

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 internet site and the City Planning & Community Development Department. State relay 711 and reasonable accommodations are available upon request.

*As noted in the public participation process for Substantial Amendments in the previous section, the CARES Act has made available additional funding in the Community Development Block Grant Coronavirus (CDBG-CV) program. The CARES Act adds additional flexibility for both the CDBG-CV grant and, in some cases, for the annual Program Year PY 2019 and 2020 CDBG grants in these unprecedented times. The public comment period is reduced to not less than 5 days, grantees may use virtual public hearings when necessary for public health reasons, the public services cap is suspended during the emergency, and States and local governments may reimburse costs of eligible activities incurred for pandemic response regardless of the date.

In addition, the CARES Act authorizes the Secretary to grant waivers and alternative requirements of statutes and regulations the Secretary administers in connection with

the use of CDBG-CV funds and Program Year PY 2019 and 2020 CDBG funds (except for requirements related to fair housing, nondiscrimination, labor standards, and the environment). Waivers and alternative requirements can be granted when necessary to expedite and facilitate the use of funds to prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus.

These revisions do not change current citizen participation policies but have been modified to allow for necessary expedited actions during times of declared disaster or emergencies.

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

1. 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.
2. The proposed Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan will be available to all citizens on the City internet site and the City Planning & Community Development Department. Citizens will be informed about the availability of the proposed Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan by notifications on the City website, publishing display advertisements in the Great Falls Tribune and emailing 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.
3. The City Commission will provide three public meetings requesting input from citizens and representatives of low to moderate income level people on grant policies and as to the needs of the community, including but not limited to housing, community development, infrastructure, economic development and homeless assistance.

*As noted in the previous sections, the CARES Act has made available additional funding in the Community Development Block Grant Coronavirus (CDBG-CV) program. The CARES Act adds additional flexibility for both the CDBG-CV grant and, in some cases, for the annual Program Year PY 2019 and 2020 CDBG grants in these unprecedented times. The public comment period is reduced to not less than 5 days, grantees may use virtual public hearings when necessary for public health reasons, the public services cap is suspended during the emergency, and States and local governments may reimburse costs of eligible activities incurred for pandemic response regardless of the date.

In addition, the CARES Act authorizes the Secretary to grant waivers and alternative requirements of statutes and regulations the Secretary administers in connection with the use of CDBG-CV funds and Program Year PY 2019 and 2020 CDBG funds (except for requirements related to fair housing, nondiscrimination, labor standards, and the environment). Waivers and alternative requirements can be granted when necessary to expedite and facilitate the use of funds to prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus.

These revisions do not change current citizen participation policies but have been modified to allow for necessary expedited actions during times of declared disaster or emergencies.

The City will provide 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 Planning & Community Development 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.

*For projects utilizing CDBG funding under Program Year PY 2019 and 2020, and the CARES Act CDBG-CV funding, the City of Great Falls may provide a 5-day notice/comment period for proposed amendments necessary to expedite and facilitate the use of funds to prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus.

All meeting venues associated with the Citizen Participation Plan process will be fully accessible to persons with disabilities and reasonable accommodations are available upon request.