

*Apr 11 2022 11:35 am*

**FITCHBURG PLANNING BOARD PUBLIC HEARING  
YEAR 48 CDBG PROGRAM APPLICANTS  
MINUTES  
JANUARY 13, 2022**

In Attendance:

**PLANNING BOARD MEMBERS**

Paula Caron, Chair  
Paul Fontaine, Jr.  
Peter Capodagli

**COMMUNITY DEV/PLANNING STAFF**

Tom Skwierawski  
Liz Murphy  
Cindy Dalton  
Mary Jo Bohart  
Herlin Jaime  
Amy LeBlanc

The meeting was held virtually, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Paula Caron opened the meeting at 6:00 p.m. Paula explained the purpose of the CDBG hearing and the upcoming schedule. Paul Fontaine explained that he will be monitoring the chat function in order to address questions, and requests that those wishing to speak use the “raise hand” function.”

Twenty-eight (28) CDBG proposals were received totaling \$1,688,356.00 in requests. Approximately \$1,001,125.00 in Year 48 funds is estimated to be available. The CDBG schedule was explained to the audience. The schedule is as follows: the Planning Board will meet on January 25<sup>th</sup> to discuss the Year 48 proposals and make a recommendation to the Mayor. The Mayor will review the Planning Board’s recommendations and submit his recommendations to the City Council for their review beginning February 23<sup>rd</sup> and will vote March 15<sup>th</sup>. The proposed Consolidated Plan and Statement of CDBG activities will be published on March 23<sup>rd</sup>. Public comments will be received up to the date of the second public hearing which is scheduled for April 27<sup>th</sup>. Submission of the Year 48 Consolidated Plan Action Plan is in May. The start-up of the new program year begins on July 1, 2022.

Tom Skwierawski, Executive Director of Community Development, referred applicants to the handouts provided in the application package that were also available at the meeting. The CDBG Program regulations were outlined. In order for a project to be eligible it must meet one of the three national objectives which include: benefitting persons of low-moderate income, eliminating slums and blight, or meeting an urgent need. Eligible activities include: public facilities, public services, demolition, economic development, rehab & preservation, planning & administration. For projects serving a low-moderate income area, at least 51% of the households must be at 80% median income or less. There is a 20% cap on planning and admin activities, and a 15% cap on public service activities. It is the city’s responsibility to insure that at least 70% of CDBG funds are used to benefit low-moderate income persons over a three-year period. Tom thanked Herlin Jaime from Community Development for providing Spanish translation services.

Paul Fontaine explained some housekeeping rules and welcomed comments from the audience.

## **PUBLIC FACILITIES AND IMPROVEMENTS**

### **PROJECT – SPONSOR** **YEAR 48 REQUEST – YEAR 47 AWARD**

#### **Parkhill Park Phase II – Parks & Recreation** **Year 48 Request: \$60,000 – Year 47 Award: \$37,500**

Continuation of projects at Parkhill Park to make improvements to the stonework along Sand Brook and repairs to the BMX Bike Park, the Ryan C. Joubert Skate Park and the baseball fields. The project will improve/preserve the stone bridges that lead hikers to the wooded sections of the park. Finally the important recreational features of the park (BMX, skate and baseball field) will be repaired to restore their usefulness to the neighborhood.

*Nate LaRose, Parks Director, spoke to this proposal. This is the second phase of a proposal funded in Year 47. It is part of safe routes to school, and the improvements include safety and recreation elements. This proposal is for improvements beyond accessibility upgrades from the prior year. Councilor Paul Beauchemin asks if the project will deal with overgrowth at the pond. Nate explains that it will work on the overgrowth on the other side of the brook. Tom explains that routine maintenance is not a CDBG eligible activity. Paul asks for clarification on the location.*

#### **Parks & Playgrounds – Community Development & Planning** **Year 48 Request: \$80,000 – Year 47 Award: \$79,499**

Replace old and outdated play equipment at Parkhill Park and JoAnn "Mama" Fitz Park, Reconstruct Basketball Court at Mama Fitz Park, Related Site work.

Removal/disposal of existing play features and site furnishings and replacement with new, code compliant, inviting play options and site furnishings. Renovation of the basketball court at Mama Fitz Park will also take place. Replacement and/or addition of some pathways will be required to meet accessibility standards. Plantings will be added to provide shade and interest to the area. Public outreach, land survey and design work will be a part of the project. City Staff, a Landscape Architect (consultant) and a contractor will be needed to complete the work.

*Tom Skwierawski, Executive Director of Community Development, notes that the department also applied for ARPA funds for this project. The proposal is for matching funds to the ARPA allocation. The project has not yet received an ARPA allocation, but a decision will be made prior to the CDBG decisions are final.*

*Paul asked why Coolidge Park is not being addressed in this year's CDBG application, noting their wide use. Tom explains that Coolidge had received CDBG funding in Year 45, and that the age of the equipment was a large factor in the decision-making.*

**Sidewalk Accessibility – Disability Commission**  
**Year 48 Request: \$43,000 – Year 47 Award: n/a**

Installation or replacement of curb ramps and sidewalk at key locations within the city to improve accessibility. Priority area one is the intersection of Wallace Ave. and Elm St. - new curb ramps are required at all four corners. Priority Area two is the intersection of Main St. and Caldwell St. where curb ramps are needed. Additionally, 175 feet of new sidewalk and replacement of new 3 curb ramps (two on Senior Center side, one on Court House side) is needed on Elm St. near the court house. This area of work connects to the intersection of Wallace Ave. and Elm St.

*Tom Skwierawski spoke on this application. These are accessibility improvements around the Courthouse and Senior Center. It's a pretty straightforward project that is also high-need. The City has received many complaints about the conditions here, and is a high priority.*

**Streetscape Improvements – Community Development & Planning**  
**Year 48 Request: \$130,000 – Year 47 Award: \$100,000**

Streetscape improvements within the urban core, city gateways or school walking routes. Funds may be utilized as match for Safe Routes to School, Complete Streets or other identified funding program. Work may include design, installation or replacement of sidewalks, curb cuts, fencing, lighting, plantings, intersection improvements or other infrastructure or accessibility improvements along City Gateways, in the urban core or other strategic locations.

*Tom explains that this funding is largely intended to be a match for other grants, including Safe Routes to School (Rollstone Middle School), and for improvements around Moran Square for accessibility and walkability. Paula asked if the City will be notified about the grants prior to decision-making. Tom notes that the department should better know by the time the Council meets. If the programs noted above are not granted, there are contingency plans for this funding.*

**Pleasant Street Sidewalks – Fitchburg DPW**  
**Year 48 Request: \$58,472 – Year 47 Award: n/a**

Proposed scope of project consist of replacing the current asphalt sidewalk with ADA compliant concrete sidewalk on the South side of Pleasant St. from the intersection of Pleasant St. and Spring St. to the existing concrete sidewalk on the South East side of the Longsjo Middle School and the addition of ADA compliant wheelchair accessible ramps on Pleasant Street at Spring Street with RRFB's and a painted crosswalk..

*Nick Erickson explains that this sidewalk is on the Longsjo side of the street, and notes that the transitions are particularly poor. This is likely to be the first of a series of CDBG applications for this area of the City. It is intended to be completed by DPW staff. The cost estimates came from the City's civil engineer, Jeff Hillman.*

*Councilor Andy Van Hazinga spoke to a citizen complaint about this section of sidewalk, and notes its heavy use. The Councilor is in support of this application.*

*Paula asks if this is eligible for Safe Routes to School. Tom says yes, but given that we have a recent application for Memorial, it cannot be applied for at this time.*

**Boutelle/Goodrich Sidewalks – DPW**  
**Year 48 Request: \$71,419 – Year 47 Award: n/a**

Proposed scope of project consist of replacing the current asphalt sidewalk with ADA compliant concrete wheelchair accessible ramps on three (3) of the four (4) corners of the intersection of Boutelle St. and Goodrich St. with RRFB's and a painted crosswalk. This project was conceived by Ward 6 City Counselor Derrick Cruz to address pedestrian safety issues at the intersection of Goodrich St. and Boutelle St. See the attached email thread discussing the project.

*Nick Erickson explains that this application was brought to the attention of the DPW by Councilor Derrick Cruz. It is another high-traffic pedestrian area. There are poor markings, insufficient signage/markings, and insufficient ramps. This is an attempt to facilitate pedestrian crossing and improve markings. It is a small but important project.*

*Paul Fontaine read an email into the record from Beth Walsh in support of this application (attached).*

*Councilor Derrick Cruz reports citizen complains about the safety issues in this area, and points to safety reports completed by the Fitchburg Police Department backing up these complaints.*

*Christine Hudson, a resident of the neighborhood, has noted the increase in both speed and accidents on Boutelle since paving. More than one accident has impacted her property. She details her experiences and is strongly in favor of this project.*

*Alexa & Dominic Sanchez, residents of the neighborhood, have 3 young children at home and worries for their safety, especially considering the location of the bus stop. Dominic is one of her children and is also worried about his safety, and that of his friends and neighbors. He suggests speed bumps or traffic lights.*

*Rebecca Jackman, a resident of the neighborhood, spoke strongly on how important this project is to the residents. She reports that pets and children have been hit by cars, and when cars land on private property, they often cause much damage, including hitting parked cars in driveways. She invites the committee to sit in her driveway and watch the traffic.*

*Debra Posco, a resident of the neighborhood, has been witness to the accidents in this area. She has been reporting these issues since 2019.*

*Danette Day, a resident of the neighborhood, asked if the funding will provide sufficient funds to address the problem. Nick says it should be sufficient to complete the work described in the scope. Nick also clarified the traffic protocols that are and are not appropriate for this project. A 4-way stop cannot be installed, but he has spoken to the Police Department around enforcement and signage. Paul asked about speed bumps. Nick explains that they're not allowed on a street like this, due to the speed limit and also water drainage, plowing, and maintenance concerns.*

*Chief Martineau thanked the residents for their testimony. He spoke to the effectiveness of these technological components that are being considered for this project. Boutelle Street is a noted concern for the Police.*

**Franklin Road Sidewalks – Fitchburg DPW**  
**Year 48 Request: \$151,222 – Year 47 Award: n/a**

Proposed scope of project consist of replacing the current asphalt sidewalk with ADA compliant concrete sidewalk on the North side of Franklin Rd. from the intersection of Franklin Rd. and Oak Hill Rd. to the existing asphalt sidewalk at the intersection of Franklin Rd. and Depot St. and the addition of ADA compliant wheelchair accessible ramps at all intersecting cross street on the North side of Franklin Rd. along Franklin Rd. with RRFB's and a painted crosswalk. The project also includes the proposal for ADA compliant wheelchair accessible ramps and concrete sidewalk at the intersection of Depot St. and Appleton Circle with RRFB's and a painted crosswalk.

*Nick Erickson notes that the original scope of the project was larger, but due to available funding constraints, scaled the scope back. ADA ramps were installed in 2019, as well as some other improvements. The focus is on the sidewalks between those ramps. As it is near Reingold School, this is a heavily-used section, especially near Appleton Circle. There is a heavily-traveled path used by children, and a crosswalk has been requested for that path.*

**North Street Sidewalks – Fitchburg DPW**  
**Year 48 Request: \$176,000 – Year 47 Award: n/a**

To install a sidewalk along the easterly side of North St. between McKay Ave. and Lincoln St. There is presently no sidewalk on either side of the street, but this roadway provides pedestrian access to the McKay School and Fitchburg State University.

*Councilor Andy Van Hazinga noted that there are no sidewalks on either side of the street, which is a hazard for the McKay students. He has spoken to the administration of the University, who are committed to providing matching funds that are yet to be determined.*

*Nick Erickson notes that the DPW has applied for ARPA funds for a portion of North St., which includes funding for engineering and design.*

**Abolitionist Park Phase III – Friends of the Fitchburg Abolitionist Park**  
**Year 48 Request: \$5,000 – Year 47 Award: n/a**

If funded again, CDBG funds would help FFAP complete the third and final phase of the Park's development, which includes: the development of an interactive display board, where images of abolitionists come to life to tell their stories and how they were connected to Fitchburg; hiring an artist to paint a mural reflecting Fitchburg's role in the Abolitionist Movement and Underground Railroad; installation of a brick and paver patio; ornamental fencing to fill the gap between the Park and Hotel Raymond parking lot, and of a flagpole light.

*David Thibault-Munoz spoke on this application. He notes that Phase I was funded at the same level in Year 46. Paula asks for clarification that CDBG would be matching funds. The Community Foundation and the Freedom Way Heritage Foundation are possible funders, as well as robust grassroots fundraising efforts.*

*Danette Day, cofounder of the Friends, speaks in favor of this proposal, noting potential for growth. She commends the volunteers who have been instrumental in the creation of this park. \$75,000-80,000 is needed to properly tell the story.*

*David clarifies that the total projected cost for Phase III is between \$60,000-75,000, to provide context. Paula asks for clarity on whether the funds will be expended during the program year. David confirms that they will.*

**Summer Street Art Improvements – NCM Association of Realtors**  
**Year 48 Request: \$5,000 – Year 47 Award: n/a**

This application is to obtain 'Improve Public Facility or Infrastructure' funds in the amount of \$5,000 to improve a commonly "tagged" area of Summer St. with a City of Fitchburg themed mural. Activities will include our Fitchburg resident artist creating a Fitchburg themed design for the mural. Disruption to everyday activities on Summer Street will be little to none as this artist is able to freehand the mural. He will be using spray paint only to complete the project.

*Nick Pelletier, president of NCMAR, notes all the improvements in the area, but that a large retaining wall has been repeatedly tagged with graffiti, no matter how many times the Association repaints it. The Association has limited funds available to improve their own facilities. A local artist has presented the concept for the mural and it would be a great addition that also addresses the problem. This would be a part of a larger improvement.*

*Councilor Cruz spoke in favor of this proposal, noting the effectiveness of murals in deterring graffiti, as taggers generally have respect for other art and won't disturb it.*

*Peter Capodagli asks about the concept for the mural. Nick explains that the concept is an artist creating art that centers the City and, as realtors, they are interested in representing the market. An artist has already been engaged.*

**Public Art Project – Community Development & Planning**  
**Year 48 Request: \$25,000 – Year 47 Award: \$50,000**

This project will expand the public art offerings in Fitchburg in the Downtown, Rail Trail, and/or Gateways. Public Art may include murals, sculpture, and interactive art installations.

*Tom explains this is a continuation of prior investment in public arts. The first mural, on the rear wall of the library, was completed by local artist, Monique Guthrie. While Fitchburg has a lot of local talent, there is a need to build artist capacity. In that vein, the Department has an RFP out that both supports development of artists and provides public art, which is a large-scale effort. Year 48 funding could bolster the downtown or a Gateway, but there is special interest in supporting art on the Rail Trail.*

*Joe Ferguson of Reimage North of Main, spoke in support of this project, and notes a commitment of matching funds. He reiterates that public art makes a great impact in revitalization.*

**Food Pantry – Highland Baptist Church**  
**Year 48 Request: \$45,000 – Year 47 Award: n/a**

The room where food is stored is in need of complete restructuring and securing in order to safely hold all food, freezers, and refrigerators. The organization has a drawn out blueprint of the plan from a company and have received bids to complete the project which is estimated at 40,000. The pantry is also in need of another commercial grade freezer and refrigerator in order to safely store more perishable food items.

*Jonathan Aleman explains that the food pantry has been in operation for over 20 years, and is volunteer-run. While they are prepared to tackle the issue of food insecurity, the storage room floor needs to be reinforced, which is both a safety issue and an opportunity to expand the program. Approximately \$40,000 is needed for the reinforcement, and funding is needed for an additional commercial-grade refrigerator and freezer (which also adds to the weight that needs support).*

**12 PROPOSALS – \$850,113**

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**PUBLIC SERVICES**

**The Public Services category is subject to a 15% cap.**

**Street Outreach – Health Dept.**  
**Year 48 Request: \$28,000 – Year 47 Award: \$28,000**

Outreach activities will be conducted in coordination with partnering agencies including referrals to medical/mental health/substance use treatment, shelter, etc. Outreach activities will include supplying necessary health, hygiene and safety items as deemed appropriate by the Outreach Workers.

*Sue Christensen spoke on this application. She provided background on the program, and how the CDBG funds help to expand their reach. There are two street outreach workers, a male and a female worker. The addition of a female worker has been an important part of the outreach. Supplies are important tools in both supporting the people, and in building trust and relationships over time.*

*Paul Fontaine asks for clarification about the Year 47 funding uses. Sue explains that the outreach worker has added one additional day. In Year 47, a different organization applied and received Planning Board review, but later on in the process removed itself from consideration. As a result, the Council agreed to fund Homelessness Services with an agency to be determined at a later date. The Health Department stepped in to provide those services, outside of the regular contract period.*

**Fitchburg Farmers Market – Growing Places**  
**Year 48 Request: \$7,887 – Year 47 Award: \$7,543**

Project funds will be used to support the Fitchburg Farmers' Market, which helps expand access to healthy food for Fitchburg families, especially marginalized populations, including low-income residents. The Fitchburg Farmers Market Manager, Assistant Market and Activity Coordinator, Community Nutrition Coordinator, and Translator will be paid through these funds.

*Ayn Yeagle spoke on this proposal. She notes the primary difference between Year 47 and Year 48's proposals is which staff are being funded. The other staff are important in furthering the mission of the Market and in improving services.*

**Spartacus Program – Montachusett Regional YMCA**  
**Year 48 Request: \$25,000 – Year 47 Award: \$10,000**

Program funds will be used to support staff salaries of the Teen Center Spartacus Program. Spartacus is a signature YMCA of Central Massachusetts initiative designed to assist at-risk teens that are vulnerable to issues like substance abuse, failing school, anger management and more make healthy decisions. The program engages participants through physical engagement, academic tutoring, community service, leadership development, anger management counseling and workshops around substance abuse and gender violence – among other topics. Youth are presented with challenges and empowered with the knowledge and confidence to help them implement creative solutions. These skills help teens build a bright future for themselves. The initiative, offered through the YMCA's Montachusett Teen Center in Fitchburg, provides students with role models from within their communities, an adult-supervised environment in which to spend time after school and practical skills they can apply in academic environments and beyond. An increase in funds is requested so that the program can grow from 50 to 100 teens due to an increased demand brought on by the ongoing pandemic and the history of the program's success and impact on Fitchburg teens.

*Ted McDonnell reviewed the program and partners. If funded at the increased level, it would double to number of youth served during the program year. Councilor Beauchemin asked about the pandemic response, and the shut downs that were related. Ted explains that there were pandemic-safe, initially through virtual services during periods of shut down. There was some attrition in Year 46, and the invoices reflected the reduction in services, but Year 47 was back to full enrollment. The YMCA has been open in Year 47. Councilor Beauchemin asked about data to back up the results claimed by the YMCA. Ted talked about tracking metrics like student grades (100% of teens see an improvement in grades). These metrics can be shared.*

*Peter Capodagli asks if the program serves Fitchburg students, only, or if other communities can participate. Ted explains that CDBG is only charged for Fitchburg students, and that almost all the students are Fitchburg residents. If the program grows, he expects some additional out-of-town students. It was noted that there are not transportation services for out-of-town students, and that may impact attendance.*

**Drug Enforcement Patrol Program – Fitchburg Police Dept.**  
**Year 48 Request: \$65,000 – Year 47 Award: \$65,000**

Program funds will be used to provide police overtime monies to conduct drug related investigations within the designated CDBG areas. Project activities will include arrest, surveillance, and execution of search warrants, drug seizures, weapons seizures, US currency seizures, and vehicle seizures. Additionally, funds will be used to conduct additional, targeted proactive patrols in the CDBG areas, primarily the Downtown and Main St district.

*Chief Martineau spoke on this proposal, and reviewed some statistics with the group, including cash, substance, and firearm seizures, warrants and arrests. This funding is vital to the Department's ability to do this work.*

**Family Homeless Shelter – North Star Family Services**  
**Year 48 Request: \$12,000 – Year 47 Award \$10,000**

North Star provides emergency shelter, comprehensive support services, basic needs, self-sufficiency case management, and a pathway to permanently affordable housing. The organization documents improvement in: Safety & Stabilization, Basic Needs, Parenting, Child Development & Social Emotional Learning, Education, Finances, Employment, Housing, Health, and Well-Being. The CDBG funds will be used to pay for staff salary costs.

*Jon Hogue explains that the shelter never closes, and that it is a 24/7 program. About half the population served were Fitchburg residents. The families, combined were able to save \$23,000, which is a major accomplishment. The Shelter staff work with the residents to become stabilized and ready for permanent housing. North Star has hired a shelter director and a Spanish-speaking case manager. This request is part of a \$400,000 operation. Jon also notes North Star's plan to develop permanent supportive housing, which will provide a place for shelter residents to transition into, although this project is separate from the Family Shelter.*

*Paula Caron notes that this is the only family shelter in the area, and its importance in allowing children to remain in their schools.*

*Councilor Beauchemin asks how the pandemic eviction moratorium affected the shelter operations. Jon notes the lack of affordable housing contributing to homelessness. Even moderate-income people have trouble affording rent and utilities. This is even worse for those making minimum wage.*

*Councilor Beauchemin also asks about the role of credit cards in their challenges. Jon explains that most don't have credit cards, as many don't have credit to begin with, or have very bad credit. So their financial coaching helps them rebuild their credit-worthiness.*

*Nick Pelletier reiterates the deficiency of affordable housing is a worse than seen in prior years, which directly correlates to rental housing issues. Even very qualified applicants can end up facing homelessness for that reason in the region.*

*Cindy Dalton notes that the shelter was at capacity at the beginning of the pandemic, which complicated plans for residents to transition into other housing.*

**Fitchburg Homelessness Prevention Project – Community Legal Aid**  
**Year 48 Request: \$20,000 – Year 47 Award: \$10,000**

Funds from the Fitchburg CDBG program will allow CLA to continue to assist tenants with eviction cases before their court dates and to represent subsidy program participants threatened with termination from the programs, work that we are unable to prioritize in the absence of dedicated funding. This project allows CLA to target specialized housing resources to Fitchburg residents, in an effort to ensure that the City's most vulnerable individuals and families get the legal help they need to prevent homelessness. The ability to focus attention on Fitchburg allows CLA to identify systemic issues that affect many more tenants than just our clients.

Other cases involve housing that is in dire need of repair. CLA is able to assert legal claims that result in improvement to housing conditions, which has the effect of making the unit more livable for the tenant and also increases the quality of the community's housing stock. Landlords in eviction cases are often represented by an attorney, making representation of tenants all the more critical. This is particularly the case in central Massachusetts. In FY 2021, in the Central Division of the Housing Court, only 8.6 percent of tenants were represented, compared to 75 percent of landlords. This demonstrates the continued crucial need for our services among tenants, as the percentage of represented landlords has grown since 2018 (when 66% were represented).

*Andrew Felper provides an overview of the program. He notes that the end of the pandemic eviction moratorium has compounded the need for services. Paula asks for clarification on the increase. Andrew explains that an increase would allow for additional service hours and additional clients. Tenants at risk of eviction and those at risk of losing their Section 8 vouchers are the primary clients. Current funding levels are not sufficient to support the need. Paula Caron asks for clarification; Andrew notes that an increase in funding directly relates to an increase in services.*

*Paul Beauchemin notes that costs for landlords has also increased, and asks for clarification on the agency's work with landlords. Andrew explains that it's about housing security, and that agreements can be reached in the interest of housing stability. Landlords are not "targeted" in the proceedings.*

**Access to Recovery – Restoration Recovery**  
**Year 48 Request: \$28,000 – Year 47 Award: n/a**

Restoration Recovery Center (RRC) is a non-profit, community-based recovery center located in Fitchburg. RRC is guided by a mission to respond to people seeking recovery using a person-centered approach that promotes long-term recovery by providing holistic and faith-based alternatives. RRC is primarily a volunteer-run and peer driven service model. Program funds will be used to pay occupancy, utilities, office supplies, etc.

*Julia Armstrong explained that the center has been largely volunteer-run, and that the center has expanded. This request is for overhead costs, as noted above. Original hours were 8am-4pm with 3 full-time volunteers to help people access recovery. 123 volunteers engaged over 1,200 people. The center serves people from all walks of life.*

**Transportation to Full STEAM Ahead Program – Boys and Girls Club**  
**Year 48 Request: \$20,000 – Year 47 Award: \$16,000**

Program funds will be used to provide one-way transportation from Fitchburg schools to the Boys and Girls Club Afterschool Program located at 365 Lindell Street in Leominster. Approximately 300 youth will be served.

*Elizabeth Coveney reviews the program and explains that without transportation support, it would negatively impact the access to this program. While the request is for transportation costs, Elizabeth provides context for the types of activities available at the Club.*

*Councilor Paul Beauchemin is in support of an increase.*

**Population Health – SproutChange**  
**Year 48 Request: \$78,900 – Year 47 Award: n/a**

Project funds will be used to provide public services in Fitchburg to improve population health among elderly, low-income, disabled persons, as well as those with chronic diseases (heart, lung, diabetes), and behavioral health disorders in Fitchburg through wellness and sustainable gardening programming that includes a budget to provide free of cost transportation stipends, childcare, and translation. Workshops include wellness programs on Food as Medicine & Natural Remedies, Mental Health, Emergency First Aid in Your Kitchen, Heart Health, Lung Health, Healthy Blood Sugar, Healthy Aging, Gut-Brain Connection, DIY Cultured/Fermented Medicinal Foods, and more. Funding will be used for workshops, staff wages, and project management expenses.

*Priscilla Espinoza explains that the proposal would increase from 1 workshop per month to 4-6 per month. She details the types of workshops available. The organization works primarily with businesses and organizations. They are also interested in providing stipends for childcare and providing translation services to improve attendance.*

*Peter Capodagli asked how long the organization has been servicing Fitchburg. Priscilla responds that they have been providing services in central Massachusetts for one year, through a relationship with HealthAlliance-Clinton Hospital. Peter asked for more details on the workshops, such as the locations and the attendance. Priscilla notes that there are 25 participants per workshop, which are currently virtual due to COVID. She notes that preventative health care can help reduce the burdens on health services.*

*Cindy Dalton notes that the CDBG program is required to expend 80% of funds to benefit low-moderate income individuals, asks how the organization plans to address that, especially as many of the clients are businesses. Priscilla explains that one client, for example, is adult day center, and low-mod clients are served there. The organization is looking at food deserts, negative health outcomes in communities served; the focus is on wellness and preventative care. The organization would also partner with other businesses and agencies who do not currently have a wellness component. There is a focus on wellness, including natural remedies, and are there to act as education resources for consumers. References Kaiser Permanente's model, but that SproutChange has a more grassroots, accessible model.*

**9 PROPOSALS – \$284,787**

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

### **Small Business Technical Assistance Program – NewVue Communities** **Year 48 Request: \$25,000 – Year 47 Award: \$25,000**

NewVue Communities seeks funding to continue to provide technical assistance to small business owners and those positioned to start a small business. Providing business owner counseling, serving minority business owners, and packaging loan (and grant) applications will be the activities that drive our effort to impact the economy in Fitchburg. Funds will be used to pay staff salary costs.

*Marc Dohan comments on the past success of this program, and provides an overview. The pandemic has exposed new challenges for businesses, and thus the program has had a large increase in demand. Additionally, the partnerships have been a major part of the program's growth: particularly with the City and the North Central MA Chamber of Commerce/Development Corporation. There is a particular need to provide services for minority business owners.*

### **Small Business Financial Assistance – Community Development and Planning** **Year 48 Request: \$100,000 – Year 47 Award: \$150,162**

Project funds will be used to provide loans/grants to Fitchburg businesses or property owners for business start-up, expansion, or to make required accessibility improvements.

*Liz Murphy reviewed the program, and notes the connections between NewVue's technical assistance program and the City's business financial assistance programs. The program has lent and granted over \$328,000 to local businesses, most of which were in the downtown. Some funding remains, but there has been a lot of need and activity. The additional funding will help to support these businesses. Perhaps surprisingly, the pandemic has seen an increase in new businesses becoming established in Fitchburg.*

*Paula Caron asks if any of the loan repayments get reprogrammed. Liz explains that the loan program is revolving, and that, due to the pandemic, many of the businesses have needed additional deferments, so loans repayment has been paused.*

### **Sign and Façade Program – Community Development and Planning** **Year 48 Request: \$60,000 – Year 47 Award: n/a**

The program will be one tool of many in the City and downtown's economic development toolbox. The City will be working with downtown property owners and code officials to eliminate blighting signage, broken windows, graffiti, and other blighting factors of downtown. This will allow the City to provide an incentive for business owners to replace signs and create a more attractive storefront within consistent design standards. This program will leverage other work as a part of the agreement. Business owners will be responsible for some match funding or in-kind improvements. Part of the assistance will include professional sign design using the City's updated design standards.

*Liz Murphy provided the context that the City used to run an active sign and façade program, and several years ago, decided to sunset the program. With the changes in business, the department felt it was time to revive the program, in conjunction with the code and zoning enforcement. This provides incentives to owners.*

*Paula Caron asks about the updated design standards. Tom Skwierawski clarifies that the standards are part of the zoning updates. It also can be done in conjunction with the new In Town marketing.*

**Fitchburg Downtown Coordinator – Fitchburg State University**  
**Year 46 Request: \$35,000 – Year 45 Award: \$30,000**

The Downtown Coordinator position, developed and supported collaboratively by the ReImagine partnership, Fitchburg State University, and The City of Fitchburg, is a critical component in the revitalization efforts underway in downtown Fitchburg. This position works directly with microenterprises by offering marketing and promotional services to grow sales and revenue for the overall economic development of downtown. The Downtown Coordinator is also responsible for developing and implementing events and activities that attract more visitors to the downtown area. Program funding will pay a portion of the Coordinator’s salary.

*Joe Ferguson reviewed the role of the Downtown Coordinator, and its particular importance to microenterprises, as well as the overall recovery strategy for downtown. The Coordinator does different work than NewVue, as it is focused on promotion, marketing, and other needed supports. The Coordinator is also responsible for events, which have a direct benefit on businesses by increasing foot traffic and increased opportunities for unconventional retail.*

*Paul Fontaine asked whether the coordinator has a physical presence at City Hall. Joe says there is no presence in City Hall, but the coordinator does have an office across the street in the Theater Block.*

*Councilor Cruz spoke in support of this application.*

**4 PROPOSALS – \$220,000**

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**REHABILITATION AND PRESERVATION**

**Critical Home Repair – Habitat for Humanity**  
**Year 48 Request: \$20,000 – Year 47 Award: \$20,000**

Critical Home Repair is exterior or interior work to alleviate critical health, life, and safety issues or code violations for homeowners in need. Participants must own their own home and have a verifiable need that falls within scope and capabilities. The home must be a primary principal residence, current on mortgage, property taxes and insurance. Repairs must be necessary to function in the home and homeowners must partner with Habitat.

*Don Capman, a family advocate for Critical Home Repair, reviewed the details of the program. The program helps to maintain the affordable stock, and keeps people in their homes. Volunteer help helps to keep costs down. Councilor Beauchemin asks if the program serves all of Fitchburg, and asked for examples. Don provides a couple neighborhoods where projects have been completed, notes the age of the housing stock, and reiterates that the repairs made are not cosmetic, but critical to the health and safety of the home, such as roofs and accessibility improvements.*

**Code Enforcement – Health Department**  
**Year 48 Request: \$103,456 – Year 47 Award: \$103,241**

The Health Department will provide comprehensive code enforcement to encourage housing rehabilitation, in the City of Fitchburg lower income neighborhoods. Code Enforcement activities will continue with goals to address substandard housing conditions and conditions of slum and blight in target neighborhoods. Funds will be used to pay for one sanitary code inspector and 50% of one clerk position.

*Steve Curry reviewed the program activities. In FY21, over 1,100 violations were reported and corrected. There are fewer vacant buildings than there used to be. He credits the legal team and AG's office their efforts on the abandoned building initiative. 9 properties were brought back onto the tax rolls through various methods. Paul Fontaine asked about how annual salary increases affect the program. Steve notes that the lowest-ranked inspector is the CDBG inspector, which helps keep costs down, but confirms that the City picks up any costs above and beyond the CDBG program funds.*

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**2 PROPOSALS – \$123,456**

**PLANNING AND ADMINISTRATION**

**CDBG Administration –Community Development and Planning**  
**Year 48 Request: \$210,000 – Year 47 Award: \$200,000**

Project funds will provide for the necessary administration of CDBG programs and sub-recipient contracts in accordance with federal guidelines, including staffing, technical services, and planning activities. This also includes the cost of various activities such as the Consolidated Plan; Consolidated Annual Performance Report; Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing; and other strategic plans and services. These funds enable the City to apply for, receive, and administer additional federal and state grants. (Funding will not to exceed 20% of entitlement.

*Paula Caron noted the 20% cap. Paul Fontaine is inclined to skip the review. Liz notes that the increase is due to a hoped-for increased allocation. Paula asked when we'll hear about the allocation. It is expected to be later than usual, due to Congressional continuing budget resolutions.*

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**1 PROPOSAL – \$210,000**

*Paul reviewed the timetable, and asked about changes. If changes need to be made, the Board is open to adjustments to the schedule.*

*The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 pm.*

Dear Mr. O'Hara,

I apologize for not attending the Planning Board meeting tonight, but I have another commitment this evening. I would like to go on the record, however, in support of CDBG #79712. The installation of 2 Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons at the Boutelle/Goodrich intersection will go a long way toward the reduction of speeding traffic and the reduction in the number of pedestrian accidents. It will allow the Fitchburg police to gather data on and direct patrols accordingly, and simply make Boutelle Street safer not only for the students who wait for the bus at that corner every school day, but also for those students who attend Goodrich Academy, St. Bernard's Elementary School, and St. Bernard's High School (all within a ½ mile radius of that corner), and the children who use the Goodrich Playground and ball field.

As a former City Councilor, I am a member of the 5-person Boutelle Street Committee, a committee whose work was the impetus for this application by Ward 6 City Councilor Cruz, the Boutelle Street Committee's leader. Last fall, then Council-Candidate Cruz, former DPW Commissioner Bosonetto, Sgt. Boudreau, and I met with approximately 35 community members, nearly all of whom were residents of Boutelle Street, to discuss ways to address the speeding traffic and the number of accidents. These are problems that have plagued Boutelle Street for years (my parents bought the house I live in, in 1951), but problems which have gotten remarkably worse in the last few years. This grant would allow the city to make Boutelle Street a safer place to live, work, play, and drive. Boutelle Street is not the only street in Fitchburg with these issues, but we can start with Boutelle Street as the prototype; we should not let perfection defeat progress.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Beth Walsh  
161 Boutelle Street  
(former Ward 6 City Councilor)

Attendees

Paul Beauchemin (Ward 2 City Councilor)  
Nicholas Erickson (DPW)  
Joseph Ferguson (Reimagine North of Main)  
Stephen Curry (Health Dept.)  
Don Capman (Habitat for Humanity)  
David Thibault-Munoz (Friends of the Fitchburg Abolitionist Park)  
Jon Hogue (North Star Family Services)  
Julia Armstrong (Restoration Recovery)  
Chief Ernest Martineau (Fitchburg Police)  
Vernesha Bruceus  
Jeff Hillman (DPW)  
Susan Christensen (Health Dept.)  
Jonathan Aleman (Highland Baptist Church)  
Nicholas Pelletier (NCMAR)  
Christine Hudson  
Rebecca Jackman  
Amy Maynard  
Alexa Sanchez  
Nathan LaRose (Parks and Recreation)  
Carolyn Read (Habitat for Humanity)  
Elizabeth Coveney (Boys and Girls Club of Fitchburg and Leominster)  
Ted McDonnel (YMCA)  
Kerry Flathers (NewVue Communities)  
Derrick Cruz (Ward 6 City Councilor)  
Karen Ceppetelli  
Wilfred Rivard  
Danette Day (Friends of the Fitchburg Abolitionist Park)  
Andrew Felper (Community Legal Aid)  
Debra Posco  
Harold Mateo  
Marc Dohan (NewVue Communities)  
Priscilla Espinosa (SproutChange)  
Ayn Yeagle (Growing Places)  
Andy Van Hazinga (Ward 4 City Councilor)

Minutes Approved: January 25, 2022