

**FITCHBURG PLANNING BOARD PUBLIC HEARING  
YEAR 46 CDBG PROGRAM APPLICANTS  
MINUTES**

**JANUARY 21, 2021**

**FITCHBURG CITY CLERK**

*Oct 20 2021 3:15 pm*

In Attendance:

**PLANNING BOARD MEMBERS**

Paula Caron, Chair  
Paul Fontaine, Jr.  
Alyne Butland  
Amanda Koeck

**COMMUNITY DEV/PLANNING STAFF**

Tom Skwierawski  
Liz Murphy  
Cindy Dalton  
Mike O’Hara  
Mary Jo Bohart

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

Paula Caron opened the meeting at 6:02 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.”

Paul Fontaine asked about use of CDBG funds for COVID. Tom Skwierawski explained the difference between regular CDBG and CDBG-CV, which is from the CARES Act. Paul F has requested a full list of CDBG-CV allocations, as well as the CDBG Year 47 applications.

Twenty-two (22) CDBG proposals were received totaling \$1,268,784.00 in requests. Approximately \$ 1,088,042.00 in Year 47 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 February 11<sup>th</sup> to discuss the Year 47 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 25<sup>th</sup> and will vote March 17<sup>th</sup>. The proposed Consolidated Plan and Statement of CDBG activities will be published on March 24<sup>th</sup>. Public comments will be received up to the date of the second public hearing which is scheduled for April 28<sup>th</sup>. Submission of the Year 47 Consolidated Plan Action Plan is in May. The start-up of the new program year begins on July 1, 2021.

Tom Skwierawski, Executive Director of Community Development, referred applicants to the handouts provided in the application package that were available in the “handouts” section of the virtual 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 provided instructions on how to reach Marissa Monteiro, who was available to provide Spanish translation services.

## **PUBLIC FACILITIES AND IMPROVEMENTS**

### **PROJECT – SPONSOR** **YEAR 47 REQUEST – YEAR 46 AWARD**

#### **North of Main Downtown Cleanup – NewVue Communities**

##### **Year 47 Request: \$50,000 – Year 46 Award: n/a**

Project funds will be used to provide supplemental beautification of the North of Main/Downtown region, including removal of debris and litter from the street and sidewalks, removal of overgrowth, and new plantings. Project will benefit the area's businesses, residents, and visitors.

*Joe Ferguson, of FSU spoke on this application. This is a new proposal. Joe explained that this project would focus on Main Street and the commercial corridors downtown. This cleanup effort may engage residents in assisting with this initiative, and this is to act as a supplement from cleanup activities in existence. Paula asked if this funding is the entire project cost, or in part. Joe says it represents the entire budget, and notes the lower budget contingency, to provide an additional option for this project at a smaller service level.*

*Paula asked if it is for both labor and materials, and if youth labor will be used? Joe explains that local property managers and vendors who will be asked for quotes, who would have their own equipment. As a hybrid model, FSU would like to employ Fitchburg youth/students/residents, provided it is safe to do so, to do some of the work, as well. ReImagine North of Main has some equipment that could be used.*

*Pete Capodagli asked if this will create any new plantings, or if it is for existing areas. Joe said it is for existing areas, to maintain and enhance existing assets.*

*Tom explained that the City has been looking at a lot of the problem property concerns and the downtown cleanliness, generally, and this project is related to those concerns. This project would provide a needed "face-lift" to downtown, and acts as a pilot project to show that beautification downtown works. .*

#### **Sam Pawlak Community Playground – Board of Parks Commissioners**

##### **Year 47 Request: \$65,000 – Year 45 Award: n/a**

Project funds will be used as a match to the recently awarded PARC grant to build a universally accessible playground. While the playground will be available to all Fitchburg families, those in the Cleghorn neighborhood, and children with disabilities will be the primary beneficiaries.

*Tom Skwierawski, Executive Director of Community Development and Planning, spoke on this application. This playground should be familiar to the planning Board, as an application came from the Sam Pawlak Community Playground group. Working with this group, the City was awarded with a PARC grant that requires a match. Some matching funds have already been secured, but this final \$65,000 would be the last funding to get us over the finish line.*

*Paul F. has spoken to the community group about this project, and believes strongly in the need for*

*this accessible playground. Paula agrees. Tom notes that the grant is for \$400,000, which is the maximum grant amount.*

**Streetscape Improvements – Community Development Department**  
**Year 47 Request: \$75,000 – Year 46 Award: \$290,900**

Project funds will be used to design, install or replace sidewalks, curb-cuts, fencing, lighting, plantings or other streetscape, infrastructure, or accessibility improvements along City Gateways, North of Main or other strategic locations. Funds will support the large-scale Main Street/Boulder Drive project, as well as Complete Streets and MassWorks projects.

*Tom S spoke on this proposal. This is an anticipated amount for projects that are currently under design, and not yet out to bid.*

**Parkhill Improvements – Fitchburg DPW**  
**Year 47 Request: \$40,000 Year 46 Award: n/a**

Project funds would be used to remove a broken up section of paved path, install a new pathway, a crosswalk, and improve crosswalks. This new connection will create a safer, unbroken pathway for residents of the Cleghorn neighborhood. The project also makes repairs to the BMX park, skate park, and baseball fields.

*Nicolas Bosonetto, DPW Commissioner spoke on this project. This project continues work that has been on ongoing in the Cleghorn neighborhood. The Beech St sidewalks were recently repaired. Letters of support are attached in the application. This park is heavily used, but needs improvements. It would provide better pedestrian and bicycle access and several safety improvements. This project will tie together work that is being done elsewhere in the neighborhood and connect to the neighboring areas. CDBG grant helps to keep improving and maintain city assets and the labor force, in the face of budget cuts.*

**Day Street/Snow Street Sidewalks – Fitchburg DPW**  
**Year 47 Request: \$68,000 – Year 46 Award: n/a**

Project funds will be used to replace crumbling sidewalks, remove barriers from sidewalks, and replaces substandard crosswalks and ADA ramps. This area is adjacent to the Fitchburg Housing Authority's Durkin Apartments, HUD's Raymond apartments, the new Abolitionist Park, and various churches. Many disabled people use the roadway, due to the condition of the sidewalks.

*Nic Bosonetto spoke on this application. This will connect a lot of important areas, including the University, places of worship, and the Abolitionist Park.*

*ADA accessibility improvements are especially important in this neighborhood.*

*Paula notes that this complements the 2 new housing developments and other investments in the area.*

**Fitchburg Police Department ADA Parking – Fitchburg DPW**  
**Year 47 Request: \$100,000 Year 46 Award: N/A**

Project funding will be used to create 8-10 additional parking spaces, including at least 2 handicap spaces at the Fitchburg Police Station. There are currently no designated handicap parking spaces. The project will also remove architectural barriers.

*Nic Bosonetto clarified that this is in the Pritchard Street area, and provides ADA accessible parking. Consultants would be used for design, but DPW would do the work. This funding fills a gap, as the project is off the right-of-way.*

*Chief Martineau explained that the PD has been pursuing grants for 3 years to improve ADA accessibility. Handicap ramp's nearest parking is on-street, but there isn't any good parking for handicap spaces. Grant requests have been unsuccessful. Parking lot is Phase II, adding at least 2 accessible spots. Phase II involves moving the records bureau. The success of this application will strengthen grants requests sent to the federal government. The federal grants have ranged from \$250-350,000 and encompass both phases. The \$100,000 would fully fund the project.*

**Public Art Project – Fitchburg Community Development**  
**Year 47 Request: \$50,000 – Year 46 Award: \$25,000**

Program funds will be used to install 2-3 murals in the downtown area. The City will conduct an RFP process to solicit artists and designers interested in creating a mural (or other public art installations) for the downtown and/or Twin Cities Rail Trail, and oversee the installation of said art installations.

*Tom spoke on this project. First completed mural is on the Boulder Drive side of the Fitchburg Public Library, which represents Greek mythological figures in a diverse way. The City has been working with the arts community, and there have been requests to include art in the closing phases of the Twin Cities Rail Trail. As a result, this application is for a higher funding amount to accommodate additional art. Tom also notes that sculpture is often much costlier than painted murals.*

*Paul asked for clarification about the mural on the back of Putnam Lanes, which is unrelated to CDBG funding. Year 46 funding will go out to RFP in the spring.*

*Joe F. comments that the Putnam Lanes mural is funded through ReImagine North of Main. The public art priority is permeating throughout the City. This mural will be completed in the spring. Pete C comments that he believes that public art is a good thing for a City, but if using wall art, wants something more lasting and destination-worthy. Would rather see a significant expenditure on a more permanent piece than less money on smaller pieces.*

## **PUBLIC SERVICES**

**The Public Services category is subject to a 15% cap. Paul Fontaine notes that, if the projects are funded in full, about 75% of the applications could be funded within the constraint.**

### **Street Homeless Intervention Program – Our Father’s House** **Year 47 Request: \$28,000 – Year 46 Award: \$28,000**

Project funds will be used to pay staff salary for a 20 hour per week Street Outreach Worker solely dedicated to the homeless within the City of Fitchburg. Connections to health and social services, mental health and addiction services will be offered along with food, clothing, blankets, and human contact. Will work with Fitchburg PD and FD. In addition, \$8,000 would be available to pay for a chronically homeless persons first month’s rent only or one-time payment in order to enable individuals to acquire and live in permanent housing and off the streets.

*Judith Pasierb and Kevin MacLean spoke on this proposal. This funding keeps an outreach worker on call 24/7, including when Police dispatch calls for outreach. The program tries to assist people in ways that they want, whether that is the shelter, or a hotel stay, or another solution. The \$8,000 is often used for first month’s rent, but can be used for a utility*

*Number of persons engaged is much higher than it has been, due to COVID.*

*Chief Martineau commented on the good relationship they have with the organization and their responsiveness.*

*Judith explained that there are a lot of extras that come with these services that are funded through fundraising or other funding sources.*

### **Fitchburg Farmers Market – Growing Places.** **Year 47 Request: \$7,543 – Year 46 Award: n/a**

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 Health Food Access Market Manager and a Translator will be paid through these funds.

*Ayn Yeagle of Growing Places spoke on this proposal. Originally the market was funded through Fun N FITchburg, which kept the fees low. FNF has not funded the market for the last 2 years. The fees are much lower for the Fitchburg market than most other markets. Supports Farmer’s Market manager and ramps up the services. The Market leverages lots of different funding sources, including SNAP and WIC. Growing Places also acts as a co-op vendor to help those vendors who cannot spare the staff to host a table.*

*Pete remembers the market having several locations. The Upper Common seemed to work well, and then it moved to the library. This is because with the on-set of COVID, Parks was uneasy with having a public market on parkland.*

**Spartacus Program – Montachusett Regional YMCA**  
**Year 47 Request: \$10,000 – Year 46 Award: \$10,000**

Program funds will be used to support staff salary of the Teen Center Spartacus Program, offering services to at-risk youth between the ages of 13 and 18 who live in Fitchburg. Emphasis will be on Youth Development, Healthy Living, and Social Responsibility through physical fitness, team building, life skills training, community service, and outdoor activities. It is estimated that 50 youth (unduplicated count) will be served between September and June.

*Ted McDonnell and Angaw Kahassai of the Montachusett YMCA spoke on this proposal. Program is designed for youth and teens who are at-risk and don't have access to supervised after school activities. The YMCA partners with MOC to provide programming. COVID has changed the program this year, and is even more needed, since the youth are more isolated and more sedentary due to online schooling.*

*Paula commends the YMCA for continuing to provide the services during the pandemic, and notes that this category is full of organizations that do a lot with a little.*

**Drug Enforcement Patrol Program – Fitchburg Police Dept.**  
**Year 47 Request: \$65,000 – Year 46 Award: \$65,000**

Program funds will be used to provide for police overtime expenses related to drug investigation activities in the CDBG Strategy Area and foot/motorcycle/bicycle patrols in targeted CDBG areas. Police activities include narcotics investigations, surveillance, undercover buys, search warrant services, and arrests. CDBG funds will be used by the Drug Suppression Unit to conduct thorough investigations on mid- to high-level dealers in the City of Fitchburg, particularly targeting the heroin and opioid market in designated CDBG areas.

*Chief Martineau spoke on this program. He thanks the Planning Board for their continued support. Last year, half of the year was under COVID restrictions, but continued to work efficiently to remove a significant amount of illicit drugs from the community. In addition, this program provides visible foot patrols, which were reduced due to COVID, but will hopefully resume in the spring.*

**Family Homeless Shelter – North Star Family Services**  
**Year 47 Request: \$12,000 – Year 46 Award \$10,000**

Program funds will provide emergency housing for homeless families in North Worcester County, including case management and follow up services. It is estimated NSFS will screen 230 referrals during the year, and expects to serve 20 Fitchburg families (with children, unduplicated count) in the shelter and emergency services. The CDBG funds will be used to partially pay for the NSFS Operations Manager salary costs.

*Jon Hogue spoke on this proposal. The shelter is open 24 hours a day, and provides shelter, training, case management, and other supports. 5 families are served at any given time. The shelter has a variety of funding sources, and CDBG is a small but significant portion of the funding. Cost of living and increased expenses due to COVID have stretched the budget. Other projects include building an*

*apartment building in Leominster, which will further support these families in their housing journey. Paula notes that this remains the only family shelter in the area, and commends the agency's sustainability and commitment.*

*Pete says he is glad to hear about the added permanent housing. Jon agrees that the need for affordable housing is great.*

*Pete asks about intake and discharge times. Jon says that in non-COVID times, it can take months before residents can find an apartment, which is part of why they are building housing.*

**Fitchburg Homelessness Prevention Project – Community Legal Aid**  
**Year 47 Request: \$20,000 – Year 46 Award: \$10,000**

Program funds will be used to assist low-income and elderly tenants at risk of eviction or loss of housing subsidy, in order to help prevent homelessness. CLA will also take on cases related to housing that is in need of repair; CLA is able to assert legal claims that result in improvement to housing conditions, making the unit more livable for the tenant, and increases the quality of the City's housing stock. In 2018, in the Central Division of the Housing Court, 93.2% of tenants were underrepresented, compared to 33.4% of landlords. Funding will support part of a Staff Attorney and the Senior Supervising Attorney.

*Daniel Schneider, staff attorney at CLA spoke on this proposal. CLA opened a Fitchburg office in summer 2019. Have continued to provide support throughout the pandemic. Having legal representation can provide a lot of support and confidence for families facing eviction court, who are often lacking representation and resources.*

**Transportation to Project Learn STEAM – Boys and Girls Club**  
**Year 47 Request: \$60,000 – Year 46 Award: n/a**

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. The Fitchburg schools include: Memorial, South Street, Reingold, Crocker, McKay, Longsjø, Sizer, and Fitchburg High School. It is estimated that approximately 1,440 transportation trips will be provided and 300 Fitchburg youth (unduplicated) served.

*Donata Martin of the Boys and Girls Club spoke on this proposal. Currently, due to the pandemic, the Club is open for a limited number of students. As this proposal is for the 2021-2022 school year, the Club hopes that operations will be back to full operations. The Club works with a variety of other partner organizations and the schools themselves. The Club is launching new programs and providing additional supports, and the bussing increases access to these programs.*

*Paul asked about the significant increase from prior funding. Costs \$68,000 to transport students to the Club, and is therefore asking for an increase.*

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**Small Business Technical Assistance Program – NewVue Communities**  
**Year 47 Request: \$25,000 – Year 46 Award: \$25,000**

Program funds will provide outreach and technical assistance to businesses, as well as help leverage loans for small businesses. It is estimated that 40 businesses will be served (unduplicated count), 60 jobs will be created/retained, and 3 loans with a value of \$75,000 total will be facilitated. Funds will be used to pay staff salary. NewVue has seen an increase in the need for intensive services for small business, and requests additional funds to meet this need for expanded support.

*Meredith Geraghty of NewVue Communities spoke on this proposal. Usually, this program is about launch of growth of small businesses, assisting with funding applications. This year, most of the work has been about navigating COVID-19 restrictions and resources.*

*Mary Jo Bohart, the City of Fitchburg’s Director of Economic Development spoke of the importance of this kind of assistance, especially during these tough economic times.*

**Small Business Financial Assistance– Fitchburg Community Development**  
**Year 47 Request: 150,000 – Year 46 Award: \$120,000 (different project)**

Project funds will be used to support new and expanding small businesses through loans and grants. Funds may also be available to commercial property owners to remove architectural barriers to accessibility where businesses exist or are opening.

*Liz Murphy, Housing and Development Director of Fitchburg Community Development and Planning spoke on this application. NewVue’s assistance has been a great complement the City’s funding. There have several inquiries for prior funding. 8 businesses have applied and approved for a loan, and we anticipate an additional 2 in the near future. Speaking to other supports and the department’s capacity to manage this program, 57 small businesses have been awarded \$2,500 emergency grants with CARES Act funding.*

*The \$120,000 in Year 46 Microenterprise grants is largely unspent, due to the focus on emergency grants.*

*Tom noted that when this application came before the Planning Board last year, there were 2 projects that were trying to mobilize, but both were significantly delayed due to the pandemic.*

**Fitchburg Downtown Coordinator – Fitchburg State University**  
**Year 47 Request: \$35,000 – Year 46 Award: \$35,000**

Program funds will be used to support the salary of the Downtown Coordinator, who will assist in planning and coordinating Main Street projects and special events; assist in the development of a shared brand strategy for Downtown Fitchburg as both a college town and arts and culture destination. This position will spend significant time on supporting microenterprises in the downtown.

*Joe Ferguson spoke on this application. This application is for the 3rd year of funding for the Downtown Coordinator. This position, currently held by Marissa Monteiro, has been a major*

*contributor to outreach to small businesses, especially the Latinx community. During the pandemic, she has provided a lot of support to businesses that needed to pivot or change their marketing strategies, as well as support those completing applications for financial assistance. As for the additional activities funded by other sources, the coordinator helped to reimagine the annual downtown events that could not take place in 2020.*

*Paul asked about the original application being pitched as a pilot where alternate funding will be found to replace CDBG funding. Tom believes that future funding may be found to supplant CDBG, but that this funding helps to stabilize the position.*

*Paul doesn't want this position to continue to be funded indefinitely, and questions whether funding is regularly used to fund a single position.*

*Tom replies that many of the funding is used to support one position.*

**A Better Life Experience (ABLE) – Fitchburg Housing Authority**

**Year 47 Request: \$10,000 – Year 46 Award: n/a**

Project funds will be used to create Individual Development Accounts for qualifying participants to save for a down payment on a home, or for start-up funds for a microenterprise.

*Liz Murphy spoke in regards to this proposal, as Doug Bushman was unavailable. These Individual Development Accounts can be used for some specific qualifying purposes, such as a down payment on a home or to start a small business. Liz supports this program, perhaps as a pilot, for these residents to have the opportunity to better themselves.*

**REHABILITATION AND PRESERVATION**

**Code Enforcement – Fitchburg BOH**

**Year 47 Request: \$103,241 – Year 46 Award: \$99,270**

Program funds will be used to pay 100% of one existing full-time BOH Inspector positions and 50% of one full-time Clerk position. Through the enforcement of the State's Sanitary and Building Codes, Fitchburg's housing stock will be greatly improved. It is estimated that 200 housing units and 900 dwellings will be inspected in the CDBG strategy area.

*Steve Curry spoke on this proposal. Although the numbers have been reduced by COVID, the inspectors are still doing a lot of exterior work and working to reduce blight. Usually, housing court is a part of this process, but COVID also acts as a barrier to that tool.*

*Paula commented on the connection between the housing stock and the abandoned properties.*

**Critical Home Repair – Habitat for Humanity**

**Year 47 Request: \$20,000 – Year 46 Award: \$20,000**

Program funds will be used to fund up to 4-6 critical repairs in Fitchburg serving 10 households. 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.

*Carolyn Read spoke on this proposal. Last year, the organization did a lot of accessibility repairs. This year, slate roofs have been a great need. Volunteers are utilized to keep the cost of the projects low, although a staff contractor is used to supervise and coordinate.*

### **CLEARANCE ACTIVITIES**

#### **Demolition – Fitchburg Community Development Department** **Year 47 Request: \$75,000 – Year 46 Award: \$160,000**

Project funds will be used to remove abandoned structures which pose an imminent threat to public safety and which contribute to slums and blight. The entire City will be served but the principal benefit will accrue to the CDBG Strategy Area in which the proposed activities will take place. It is estimated that 4 buildings containing up to 12 units will be demolished. Consultants will be hired for specific expertise such as environmental assessment or engineering services.

*Paul queries as to why the proposal isn't for a higher amount. Liz Murphy spoke on this proposal and explains that in many years, the request amount is high because the queue was large. This round of demolition was very challenging.*

### **PLANNING AND ADMINISTRATION**

#### **CDBG Administration – Fitchburg Community Development Department** **Year 47 Request: \$200,000 – Year 46 Award: \$199,244**

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.

*Liz explained that Administration is an estimated number, based on the assumed 20% admin cap.*

*Paula explains that by the next meeting, the board will have a spreadsheet with the Department's recommendations.*

*The hearing was adjourned at 8:11 pm.*