

## **CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PLAN**



### **Office of Community Development**

City of Westfield, Massachusetts

### **Emergency Amendment 4/15/2020**

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) (Public Law 116-136) has made available supplemental funding, flexibilities, and waivers in response to COVID-19. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has allocated supplemental HOPWA, ESG, and CDBG funding in response to COVID-19. The supplemental awards are to prevent, prepare for, or respond to coronavirus. The CARES Act also provides CDBG grantees with flexibilities for 2019 and 2020 CDBG Grant Amendments for coronavirus response. The Citizen Participation requirements have been waived or changed by HUD as follows:

**CDBG** – The public comment period is reduced to not less than 5 days, grantees may use virtual public hearing when necessary for public health reasons.

**Citizen Participation for Substantial Amendments to Action Plans  
2019 and 2020 in response to COVID-19:**

CDBG: The substantial amendment will be published as follows:

Publication on the City's website at

[www.cityofwestfield.org](http://www.cityofwestfield.org).

Notice of publication on the City's social media platforms, including Facebook.

A comment period for the required five days

A virtual live hearing during the five-day comment period at

[www.westfieldtv.org](http://www.westfieldtv.org) or through the City's Channel 15 cable access. The public throughout the duration of the hearing can submit comments by joining the meeting via phone conference at 413-572-6200 (choose Option 9).

Additional submission of comments will be allowed as follows:

- o Written comments mailed to the Office of Community Development,
  
- o Via email to [p.miller@cityofwestfield.org](mailto:p.miller@cityofwestfield.org)
- o By telephone, to the City of Westfield's Office of Community Development at (413) 572-6246.

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### Introduction

Pursuant to the citizen participation requirements of 24 CFR Section 91.105, the City of Westfield's Department of Community Development sets forth the following Citizen Participation Plan as it relates to the consolidated planning process for housing and community development programs funded by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The Citizen Participation Plan presents the City's plan for providing and encouraging all citizens, particularly low- and moderate- income citizens, to participate in the development and adoption of four components of the consolidated planning process:

- 1.) The Citizen Participation Plan
- 2.) The Five-Year Consolidated Plan
- 3.) Substantial Amendments to the Consolidated Plan
- 4.) The Annual Action Plan
- 5.) The Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER)

### **Lead Agency and Administering Agencies**

The Department of Community Development & Planning is the lead agency responsible for administering the programs covered by the Consolidated Plan, and the Annual Action Plan or any other HUD related documents. This Division is made up of the following departments: Community Development (OCD), Planning, and Off-Street Parking Division. The Department administers funds provided to other City Departments to carry out the plan, which include Parks and Recreation, Public Works, Engineering, and the Council on Aging. The Division also administers grant funding to various agencies and nonprofit organizations to carry out the plan. The OCD is the lead agency responsible for the Consolidated Planning process and the administration of the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) and the Home Investment Partnerships Program (HOME). All of these funds are collectively known as Community Planning and Development (CPD) funds.

In accordance with the regulations, the minimum annual number of public hearings at which citizens may express their views concerning the Consolidated Plan Documents shall be two (2) public hearings. These public hearings shall occur during the public review and comment period for the Annual Action Plan and for the Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report. Additional public hearings and comment periods will be held when substantial amendments to the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan become necessary as described later in this document. The City, at its discretion, may conduct additional outreach, public meetings or public hearings as necessary to foster citizen access and engagement.

The plan shall be effective until it is amended or otherwise replaced. Understanding the importance of citizen input, it is the City of Westfield's goal to encourage citizen participation in the development of its five-year Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plans, particularly from those citizens most affected by Community Development Programs. This Citizen Participation Plan establishes the policies and procedures that the City of Westfield will follow to ensure that participation is as inclusive as possible.

The City of Westfield intends that its Community Development Program has the support of the largest possible number of people in the community. Emphasis is placed on opportunities for participation by low/moderate income persons and the organizations and agencies that serve low/moderate income persons through the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) and the HOME Investment Partnership Program (HOME).

## **Encouragement of Citizen Participation**

The City will implement this Plan that is designed to encourage citizens to participate in the development of the Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plan, substantial amendments to the Consolidated Plan and Performance Reports, CAPER. As described within this section, the City will encourage the input of low moderate income residents by (1) outreach to the public through social media and web postings, (2) conducting a series of public hearings at various stages of the planning process, (3) creating a system to accept and respond to written comments from the citizens.

The City encourages participation by low and moderate-income persons, particularly those living in slum and blighted areas and in areas where CPD funds are proposed to be used, and by residents of predominantly low and moderate-income neighborhood. The City will also take appropriate actions to encourage the participation of all its citizens, including minorities and non-English speaking persons, as well as persons with disabilities.

HUD defines low and moderate-income persons or households as those whose gross annual income is less than 80% of the area median income. HUD publishes those income limits annually. For the current annual income limits citizens may contact OCD.

The City encourages the participation of local and regional institutions, the Continuum of Care and other organizations (including businesses, developers, nonprofit organizations, philanthropic organizations, and community-based and faith-based organizations) in the process of developing, amending, and implementing the Consolidated Plan. The City encourages, in consultation and cooperation with public housing agencies and the participation of residents of any public and assisted housing developments located within the City, in the process of developing and implementing the Consolidated Plan.

The City may also explore alternative public involvement techniques and quantitative ways to measure efforts that encourage citizen participation in a shared vision for change in communities and neighborhoods, and the review of program performance. The Citizen Participation Plan has been and will continue to be amended as the City continues to gain access to technology that improves the avenues of participation.

The Citizen Participation Plan shall be provided in a format accessible to persons with disabilities upon request. Such formats may include, but are not limited to providing oral, Braille, electronic or large print versions of the plan to those visually impaired and delivering copies to those who are homebound.

The plan will encourage comment and participation by minority and non-English speakers, and, when feasible, translation services will be available upon request by contacting the OCD, [p.miller@cityofwestfield.org](mailto:p.miller@cityofwestfield.org).

The plan will encourage comment and participation by low- and moderate-income residents, especially those living in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods and in areas where CDBG funds are proposed to be used.

Written comments will be accepted by OCD during the public review period by emailing [p.miller@cityofwestfield.org](mailto:p.miller@cityofwestfield.org). A summary of all written comments and those received during the public hearing as well as the City's responses will be attached to the Citizen Participation Plan prior to submission to HUD.

The approved Citizen Participation Plan will be kept on file by the OCD, and online at:

<https://www.cityofwestfield.org/701/Community-Development-Block-Grant-CDBG>

Hard copies can be made available to those requesting the plan by contacting the OCD, [p.miller@cityofwestfield.org](mailto:p.miller@cityofwestfield.org). Upon request, the approved plan will be made available in a manner accessible to non-English speakers or those with disabilities.

The City is committed to making information available and accessible to all interested parties. At a minimum, the City will provide information concerning proposed activities, including amount of assistance, range of activities to be undertaken and the amount that will benefit low/moderate income persons.

### **Development of the Consolidated Plan**

Before the City adopts a consolidated plan, the City will make available to citizens, public agencies, and other interested parties, information that includes, but not limited to:

- The amount of assistance the City expects to receive in its annual allocation, other grant funds, and program income
- The range of activities that are proposed to be undertaken
- The estimated amount of funds that will benefit persons of low- and moderate-income
- Plans to minimize displacement of persons, and to assist any persons who are displaced, including specifying the types and levels of assistance the City will make available to persons displaced even if the City expects no displacement to occur.

## **Summary of the Consolidated Plan Development Process**

- Data Collection, Outreach, and Consultation
- Con Plan Draft process
- Public Review
- Staff editing plan; finalizing document for HUD
- Submission of plan to HUD for review and acceptance

### **Publication of Materials/Notices of Hearings**

To ensure that the City provides for maximum citizen participation, the City will always provide sufficient information to permit informed comment, and conduct hearings at times and locations convenient to potential and actual beneficiaries. In order to accomplish a robust citizen participation process, the City will:

1. Ensure participation among low/moderate income residents in areas where funds are proposed to be spent and to public housing residents, by publishing legal notices with a summary of the proposed consolidated plan 14 days prior to public hearings and releases of all documents and informing citizens where hard copy or electronic documents will be available for public review.

Legal notices are published 14 days prior to the public hearing in The Westfield News and on the City's website at [www.cityofwestfield.org](http://www.cityofwestfield.org).

2. The City will also increase its efforts to maintain communication with directors of programs to notify them of pertinent dates and presenting them with information. The City will utilize The Westfield News, the City's website, and the City's social media channels. The documents, mailings and notices will be posted on the City of Westfield's Office of Community Development's website: <https://www.cityofwestfield.org/701/Community-Development-Block-Grant-CDBG>
3. All documents will be made available to the public at no charge. Upon request, when feasible, and within a reasonable timeframe, the Draft and approved plan will be made available in a manner accessible to other non-English speakers, or those with disabilities.
4. Utilize the Office of Community Development's web site to publicize public hearings, periods of review, summaries of information, etc.

The City will continually review this policy and will modify accordingly.

## **Period of Review**

The City's Draft Consolidated Plan, Draft Annual Action Plan and any substantial amendments will be made available for public review and comment for thirty (30) days prior to submission to HUD. The Performance Report, CAPER, will be made available for public review and comment for fifteen (15) days prior to submission to HUD. All of these documents will be available for review at multiple locations, including the Office of Community Development's website, to increase the likelihood of citizen participation. Those locations are as follows:

Office of Community Development, 59 Court Street; Office of the City Clerk, 59 Court Street; the Westfield Athenæum, 6 Elm Street, and the City's website <https://www.cityofwestfield.org/701/Community-Development-Block-Grant-CDBG>

To further elicit comment, the City offers citizens the opportunity to present testimony at public hearings or, if they prefer, written commentary may be submitted. All citizen input received will be incorporated into the City's Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plan, Substantial Amendments and Performance Reports.

## **Public Hearings**

The City will conduct a series of public hearings to address housing and community development needs during the development of the Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plan. The City will hold at least two (2) hearings during this phase. All public hearings shall be scheduled and conducted in compliance with applicable requirements of 24CFR Part 91.105(e). The City holds public hearings in accessible buildings and both in the evenings and during the day to maximize participation. Upon request, and within a reasonable timeframe, the City will make reasonable accommodations for persons that are visually or hearing impaired. All requests for a reasonable accommodation should be directed to the Office of Community Development, 59 Court Street [p.miller@cityofwestfield.org](mailto:p.miller@cityofwestfield.org)

In order to receive comment on the Draft Consolidated Plan, Draft Annual Action Plans, and Substantial Amendments, the City will hold a public hearing during the 30-day comment period. All comments received will be submitted to HUD as an attachment to the Consolidated Plan/Annual Action Plan, as will minutes of the public hearings. If any comments are not accepted, the City will set forth the reasons within its Plan.

In order to receive comment on the City's Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Reports, (CAPER), the City will hold a public hearing during the 15-day comment period.

## **Amendments**

The City shall amend its approved Consolidated Plan whenever it makes one of the following decisions:

- (1) To make a change in its allocation priorities or a change in the method of distribution of funds;
- (2) To carry out an activity, using funds from any program covered by the Consolidated Plan (including program income), not previously described in the Annual Action Plan; or
- (3) To change the purpose, scope, location, or beneficiaries of an activity

Once the final Consolidated Plan has been submitted by the City of Westfield for HUD's approval, significant changes, or "Substantial Amendments" to the accepted Plan will require citizen notification and comment. The criteria defining a Substantial Amendment will include:

- (a) Activities which will require new goals/objectives for the current fiscal year;
- (b) Changes in the use of CDBG funds from one eligible activity to another
- (c) An activity which will require a funding change that exceeds 30% of the approved allocation for that activity.

If any one of these actions occurs within the fiscal year of the approved Plan, community development officials will seek public comment for the proposed change. A notice will be published in the local newspaper summarizing the significant change. The City of Westfield will make available at the aforementioned locations information describing the details of the change to the Consolidated Plan. Public input will be solicited for a period of 30-days and reviewed at the conclusion of that time. The proposed change accompanied by a summary of the public comments and any comments not accepted and the reasons therefore will be attached to the Substantial Amendment and submitted to HUD as described below.

All other changes to the Consolidated Plan documents that do not meet the criteria defined above will be reviewed and approved by City staff and will not be subject to public comments. These changes will be fully documented and must be signed by the official representative of the jurisdiction authorized to take such action.

The City may submit a copy of each amendment to HUD as it occurs, or at the end of the program year. Letters transmitting copies of amendments

must be signed by the official representative of the jurisdiction authorized to take such action.

### **Technical Assistance**

The City of Westfield will provide technical assistance to any organizations who have received funding through our programs and those that request such assistance in developing proposals for funding under any programs covered by the Consolidated Plan, either upon their request or the City of Westfield may request it. The level and type of technical assistance shall be determined by the City. The OCD will not provide any information that will give one applicant an advantage over another.

### **Anti-Displacement Plan**

The City is sensitive to displacement and the effects resulting therefrom. Therefore, prior to commencement of a project funded through the City that either potentially, or most certainly, displaces a person or persons, top City officials will consider the overall public benefit(s) of the project and discuss potential alternatives to determine whether the project should move forward. Authorization will be given only when there is significant public benefit that outweighs the displacement. In the event that displacement will occur, the City will provide the necessary assistance to affected persons to minimize the trauma of displacement. Assistance would include moving expenses, rental assistance, assistance with identifying other housing, etc. The actual type and level of assistance will be made on a case-by-case basis, but will be sufficient to ease the transition for the displaced persons. All assistance shall be in compliance with applicable sections of the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended (URA).

### **Complaints**

A complaint regarding the Consolidated Planning process, Consolidated Plan amendments, and applicable programs must be submitted in writing. A written response will be made to written complaints within 15 working days, acknowledging the letter and identifying a plan of action, if necessary.

The City will accept written complaints provided they specify:

- The description of the objection, and supporting facts and data; and
- Provide name, address, telephone number of the person submitting the complaint, and a date of complaint.

All written complaints shall be submitted to: [p.miller@cityofwestfield.org](mailto:p.miller@cityofwestfield.org)