

City of Easthampton
Community Development Block Grant Program

Meeting Minutes
Pre-Application Public Hearing
FY 2022/2023 Community Development Fund

Held Remotely via Google Meet
Thursday, February 9, 2023 @ 5:00 PM

Meeting recording: youtube.com/watch?v=gRdZcAXwujk

Attended by: City Council President Homer Gomez, City Councilor Koni Denham, DPW Director Greg Nuttleman, DPW Engineer Dan Murphy, DPW Staff Engineer Diane Rossini, Parks & Recreation Director John Mason, City Planner Jeff Bagg, Assistant Planner Jamie Webb, and 17 members of the public (see attached attendance report)

Easthampton Assistant Planner Jamie Webb opened the hearing at 5:01PM and welcomed those in attendance, introduced the Easthampton City Officials present, explained the purpose and format for the meeting, and began a slideshow presentation. Ms. Webb noted that we will be holding another public hearing in the spring to evaluate the entirety of the 2020 CDBG program (Charles St Reconstruction, Housing Rehab, Aging-in-Place, & New City Planning Study) and the 2021 CDBG program (Cherry St reconstruction).

Assistant Planner Webb explained that CDBG is a federally funded program that passes money through the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development to fund projects that primarily benefit low to moderate income individuals and families. Projects are usually related to infrastructure improvements or social services although they can take other forms as well. The City of Easthampton does not automatically receive these funds, we must apply to DHCD for a competitive grant every year and show public support through this hearing for our applications. Typically limited to \$1.35 million over two grant years but the state combined the 2022 & 2023 grant applications due to COVID delays in the 2021 application. We are eligible to apply for up to \$1.35 million for this grant year only. The application is due to DHCD by midnight on March 3rd, 2023.

Ms. Webb continued with a background of the proposed projects which are proposed to be a continuation of the previous New City infrastructure master planning process that was funded from the 2020 block grant program. The master planning process began in the fall of 2021 and continued through the spring of 2022. The City contracted with consulting engineers, Fuss & O'Neill to survey and assess the neighborhood infrastructure, held two community meetings to better understand residents' needs & desires, and presented their findings to the City Council. The short summary of findings is that the neighborhood needs many improvements to the 100+ year old underground water, sewer, and drainage infrastructure. Repair and replacement of

these systems will necessitate that the streets & sidewalks are opened up for access and then restored afterwards. The restoration provides opportunities to rethink how the restoration happens, to add green infrastructure, new parks, and bicycles & pedestrian amenities. The full master plan is available on our website easthamptonma.gov/newcity for viewing and downloading.

Ms. Webb then discussed the proposal for the 2022/2023 grant which is to apply for funding for infrastructure and parks improvements in the New City Neighborhood – specifically the final design with community involvement, creation of construction documents, & cost estimates for:

- the rehabilitation of public parks at the Parsons Street Playground and Lincoln Street Parcel
- the first phase of public infrastructure rehabilitation in the New City Neighborhood, which will include:
 - water, drainage, green infrastructure, streets & sidewalks on Oakdale Pl, Dartmouth St, Exeter St, Federal St, Glen Cove Pl, and Emerald Pl; and
 - cured in place pipe sewer lining & spot repairs on the aforementioned streets plus Lincoln St, Harrison Ave, Clinton St, Maine Ave, and Lewandowski Ave; and
 - matching funds for the MVP funded Emerald Place project: slope restoration, pedestrian path connection to Everett St, and bike bridge over Lower Mill Pond spillway (Ferry St)

Ms. Webb wrapped up with an overview of the proposed budget for the project, timelines for the application and future phases of work, and an appeal to those present to participate in the income survey by taking it and encouraging other who live in the neighborhood to take it.

City Planner Jeff Bagg added that this is an ambitious, large, neighborhood design project and that the approach is similar to other large projects with a design completed early on and construction completed over time. The Admiral Street Neighborhood Improvement project began with design funding in 2014 and then took four rounds of grant funding to complete the improvements culminating in the 2020 CDBG application. We are trying to align CDBG funding to this neighborhood and use other funding sources for projects elsewhere in the City that don't qualify for CDBG funding. Examples of that are using MVP funds for the Cherry Street Improvements; DOT funds for the Northampton Street and Main Street redesigns; MassWorks for the infrastructure areas around the former elementary schools. In all these projects, the City is trying to fix the underground infrastructure first and then to restore the surface with pedestrian and other amenities.

Assistant Planner then opened up the hearing to questions and comments from the public present.

Jessica Allan, Easthampton resident & Real Estate Project Manager at Valley CDC: these are great projects and it is exciting to see these infrastructure projects moving forward in New City. There is a lot of need for them and the projects have been in the works for a long time. Also wanted to comment that affordable housing is very important and that Valley CDC currently is working with the City to identify sites for new affordable housing and to build new units in Easthampton. CDBG

funds are often a source that Valley uses to help create new units and is commenting to ensure that the City does not lose sight of the fact that affordable housing is a priority for the City and that it continues to be a priority under the CDBG program as there are many sites in the city that could benefit from CDBG housing funds.

Gwynne Morrissey, Easthampton resident & Chairperson of the Easthampton Economic Development & Industrial Commission: is in support of the application and very happy with how we are choosing to apply for funding to support the city's priority projects. Infrastructure in New City is really old and needs to be replaced – it's been a while since close attention has been paid to it and this work is needed. Improvements to the parks are also quite needed. Agrees with the previous comment that affordable housing is also very important to the city and it should continue to be a use of CDBG funds going forward.

John Mason, Easthampton Parks & Recreation Director: is also in support of the project and is excited by the idea of the pocket parks and larger park improvements for this neighborhood as it is lacking in parks and green space. The Parks & Recreation Commission is also in support of this project and excited to be part of the process of improving the whole neighborhood.

Jeff Bagg reminded everyone to take the income survey and to tell their neighbors to take the survey. It is very important to get this data so that we can prove to DHCD that the neighborhood qualifies for funding.

Stan Diamond, Easthampton resident: has heard many complaints about the intersection of Parsons Street and Ferry Street – it is a dangerous intersection with poor sight lines and fast traffic. Is asking the City to look into improving this intersection as part of the grant application.

Jeff Bagg responded that this intersection is outside the neighborhood and would likely not qualify for CDBG funding and that other funding sources would have to be used. The DPW & Planning Department are actively looking into it and have preliminary designs and cost estimates. The issue is that the cost to improve the sight lines is prohibitive for the City to take on alone. We are looking into including this work with a future MassWorks application to help with the continued redevelopment of the One Ferry Street complex.

After confirming that there were no further questions, comments or discussion, Assistant Planner Webb reminded everyone that we will still be taking public comment via email to jwebb@easthamptonma.gov until March 3rd, thanked everyone for participating, and closed the public hearing at 5:23pm.