



Public Notice

Proposal to Use Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Funding to Mitigate Economic Impacts Caused by COVID-19 by Establishing a Small Business Recovery Program and Proposed Amendments to the Citizen Participation Plan, 2016-2020 Consolidated Plan, and the 2019-2020 Annual Action Plan

St. Johns County hereby gives public notice of a proposal to mitigate the economic impact caused by COVID-19 by establishing a CDBG-funded Small Business Recovery Program. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides St. Johns County with an annual allocation of CDBG funding that can be used for a variety of community development needs. In addition to the annual CDBG allocation, in April 2020, HUD made available to the County supplemental funding to be used specifically for the purpose of preventing, preparing for, and responding to coronavirus.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) is the Federal legislation that makes supplemental CDBG funding available and specifies the requirements for the use of this funding. This supplemental funding is referred to as CDBG-CV. Additionally, the CARES Act provides the County with flexibilities that make it easier to use CDBG-CV grants, as well as fiscal years 2019 and 2020 CDBG Grants, for response to COVID-19. A Public Notice published on April 11, 2020 stated that the County reserved the right to use flexibilities offered by HUD, if those flexibilities aided the County in being more agile and efficient in its response to COVID-19.

To address the HUD-approved flexibilities resulting from the CARES Act, St. Johns County proposes to add the following two paragraphs to page 11 of the Citizens Participation Plan:

During times of Federal or State declared emergencies, the County reserves the right to use any waivers, flexibilities, or provisions granted by HUD, when such provisions are aimed at increasing the County's flexibility or efficiency to respond to emergency situations and to expedite the use of grant funds.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, HUD approved waivers to certain requirements to allow the County to safely and rapidly respond to the crisis. One HUD-approved waiver the County reserves the right to use is limiting public meetings held for the purpose of informing citizens about the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the CDBG program and soliciting questions and comments from the public. Limiting public meetings is intended to reduce the spread of COVID-19 during gatherings of people. Another HUD-approved waiver the County reserves the right to use is reducing the Public Comment period for substantial amendments to the Consolidated Plan

and Annual Action Plan from 30 days to no less than 5 days. This waiver is intended to make the County more agile in implementing activities in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

The County proposes to establish a CDBG-funded Small Business Recovery Program to offer grants and/or loans to small businesses located in St. Johns County. The program is intended to assist eligible business with capital expenses, such as payroll and rent, with the intended result of retaining jobs and retaining tax-paying business; thereby, mitigating the economic impact of COVID-19 on the citizens of St. Johns County.

The County proposes to use the following grant funds, totaling \$2,125,994, to operate the CDBG-funded Small Business Recovery Program:

- \$585,519 allocated through CDBG-CV
- \$744,212 from the 2019 CDBG allocation
- \$796,263 from the 2020 CDBG allocation

Funds from the 2019 CDBG allocation will be made available for the CDBG-funded Small Business Recovery Program by repurposing funds that had been originally reserved to support affordable housing projects. This decision is based on the extreme negative impact that the COVID-19 crisis is expected to have on our citizens and the local economy. Affordable Housing remains a priority goal for the County; therefore, alternative methods of funding these Affordable Housing projects with future CDBG funds will be considered.

For the County to establish the CDBG-funded Small Business Recovery Program, a substantial amendment to the 2016-2020 Consolidated Plan and a substantial amendment to the 2019-2020 Annual Action Plan must be made, as outlined and required in the County's Citizens Participation Plan.

The County proposes to amend the 2016-2020 Consolidated Plan by adding a Priority Goal for Economic Development. The County proposes to amend the 2019-2020 Annual Action Plan by adding a Goal and Project for Economic Development. The proposed goal for Economic Development is supported by section 105(a)(17) (42 U.S.C. 5305(a)(17)); 24 CFR 570.203(b), which authorizes provision of assistance to private, for-profit entities, when appropriate to carry out an economic development project.

In accordance with the County's Citizen Participation Plan, citizens are encouraged to participate in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the CDBG program. Citizens are encouraged to comment on the use of the waivers mentioned above as well as the proposed amendment to the Citizens Participation Plan and the proposed substantial amendments to the 2016-2020 Consolidated Plan, and 2019-2020 Annual Action Plan.

All questions and comments related to the CDBG program may be mailed to 200 San Sebastian View, Suite 2300, St. Augustine, FL 32084, or emailed to housing@sjcfl.us, or given verbally by calling 904-827-6890. A written response will be given within 15 days, to all written questions or comments received.

Current versions of the Citizens Participation Plan, 2016-2020 Consolidated Plan, and the 2019-2020 Annual Action Plan can be viewed at <http://www.sjcfl.us/Housing/CDBG.aspx>. The drafts containing the proposed amendments to Citizens Participation Plan, 2016-2020 Consolidated

Plan, and the 2019-2020 Annual Action Plan can also be viewed at <http://www.sjcfl.us/Housing/CDBG.aspx>.

Final action will be taken on the proposed amendments to the Citizens Participation Plan, the 2016-2020 Consolidated Plan, and the 2019-2020 Annual Action Plan, at the regularly scheduled meeting of the Board of County Commissioners to be held at 9:00 a.m. on May 5, 2020. These amendments will provide the authority for the County to pursue the development and implementation of the CDBG-funded Small Business Recovery Program.

Meetings of the Board of County Commissioners take place in the County Auditorium, located at 500 San Sebastian View, St. Augustine, FL 32084. Citizens may offer public comments at this meeting. Accommodations have been made to provide for social distancing at meetings of the Board of County Commissioners. Citizens may also offer public comments about the proposed actions via telephone, during this meeting, by calling 904-209-1265. Additional information about call-in participation during County meetings can be found at: <http://www.sjcfl.us/media/MeetingsCV-19.pdf>. Meetings can be viewed on Comcast cable channel 3, or online at <http://www.sjcfl.us/GTV>.

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, persons needing a special accommodation to participate in the CDBG program or in public meetings should contact the ADA Coordinator at 904-209-0650. Deaf and/or hard-of hearing individuals may use Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD): 904-209-0650, or the Florida Relay Service: 800-955-8770. CDBG information is provided in English; the Board of County Commissioners meeting will also be conducted in English. If you require a translator, please call 904-209-0650. To request services, please notify the County at least five business days prior to need for services.

