

Baltimore County, Maryland

Citizen Participation Plan

I. Introduction

Baltimore County is committed to making local government reachable and responsive to its residents. The Citizen Participation Plan outlines procedures Baltimore County will follow in order to support community involvement and compliance with the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) requirements for the Consolidated Plan. Opportunities for involvement in governmental decision-making and community development issues existed beyond the scope of the federal requirements. This plan is only one component of Baltimore County's extensive and on-going efforts to provide meaningful opportunities for all county residents to fully participate in their government.

The Consolidated Plan is a document submitted to HUD which serves as the community development plan, and guides submissions for funding under HUD Community Planning and Development formula grant programs, including the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG), the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG), and the Home Investment Partnership (HOME) Program.

The Citizen Participation Plan presents the County's plan for providing for and encouraging all citizens to participate in the development, revision, substantial amendment, adoption, and implementation of:

1. The Citizen Participation Plan (CPP);
2. The Analysis of Fair Housing Impediments(AFHI);
3. The Consolidated Plan (CP);
4. The Annual Action Plan (AAP); and,
5. The Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER)

The Department of Planning is the lead agency responsible for creating the Consolidated Plan and the Citizen Participation Plan. Additional goals of the Department of Planning are to:

- Implement programs and projects that strengthen communities
- Improve housing opportunities
- Revitalize older commercial centers
- Preserve rural resources
- Formulate policies, plans, and regulations to guide the County's growth and development for future generations.

Federal Requirements

Federal regulations require the publication of the following information:

- The amount of CDBG, HOME, and ESG funds expected to be available;
- The range of activities that available funds may be used for;
- The estimated amount of available funds proposed to be used for activities that will benefit low and moderate income persons;
- The proposed CDBG, HOME, and ESG activities likely to result in displacement of persons as a result of proposed activities, and the plans to minimize said displacement;
- The types and levels of assistance the grantee will make available (or will require others to make available) to persons displaced by CDBG, HOME, and ESG funded activities, even if no displacement is expected to occur.

Federal regulations require that information be provided and input be sought in certain ways:

- Two public hearings are required to obtain the views of citizens on housing and community development needs, non-housing community development needs, development of proposed activities, and review of program performance. The public is given a minimum of two weeks' notice of the hearing dates and one of the hearings must occur during the development of the plan with a minimum of 30 days to provide comments.
- A Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plan, and a Consolidated Annual Performance Evaluation Report are required, and when drafts are made available will be advertised in the local newspaper. Copies of the publications will be made available for citizens in each Baltimore County public library and on the County's website. An opportunity to comment on the community development goals and strategies, use of funds, and County's performance in meeting community objectives will be provided for a minimum of 30 days for the Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plan, with a minimum of 15 days provided for the Consolidated Annual Performance Evaluation Report. Publications are provided in alternative formats upon request. All written comments are considered and included in final reports. Any Analysis of Fair Housing Impediments undertaken by the County will follow the same protocol of citizen participation.

Methods of Participation

Input from county residents is sought in a variety of ways, such as attending meetings of civic associations and business groups in areas where federal CDBG, HOME or ESG funds are proposed to be used and reaching out through non-profit partners and to private citizens. Below is a sample of some outreach efforts to provide for participation:

- Small group discussions, work groups and task forces are convened around topics such as affordable housing and code enforcement and to address the needs of specific groups, such as seniors, renters, persons with disabilities or the homeless.
- Community meetings are attended: staff members serve as guest speakers, meet with neighborhood and other special-interest groups, and serve on a variety of committees to explain programs and solicit comments on community development needs, goals, strategies, priorities, and the projected use of funds as described in the Consolidated Plan, as well as to discuss past performance and obtain feedback.
- Interest groups are consulted: staff members solicit input from agencies representing special interest groups, such as nonprofit service providers and others so that the opinions of low-income residents, residents of public and assisted housing, persons with disabilities, those with limited English proficiency, the homeless and others with special needs are considered in determining needs, setting goals and priorities, and evaluating accomplishments.
- Opportunity for electronic input is provided: both HUD and the County have internet web pages which provide the public with an opportunity to view and comment on relevant information
- In accordance with federal requirements, the public is made aware of any substantial changes to activities described in the Consolidated Plan, and is provided with reasonable and timely access to information relating to the Consolidated Plan and regarding the use of CDBG, ESG, or HOME assistance received.
- A sign language interpreter can be available upon request by contacting the Department of Planning at least five business days prior to the hearing.
- Upon request, and pursuant to 91.115(a)(4), the County will meet the needs of non-English speaking residents at public hearings where a significant number of non-English speaking residents can be reasonably expected to participate. Requests for interpreters should be given at least two weeks in advances of the required date.

Scope of Participation

All aspects of citizen participation shall be conducted in an open manner with freedom of access for all interested persons. Special emphasis has been placed on encouraging participation by persons of low and moderate incomes, residents of blighted neighborhoods. Citizens are encouraged to participate in all aspects of the CDBG and HOME programs and will be provided meaningful access to program information. Technical assistance will be provided to those citizens requesting assistance in developing proposals for funding assistance under the programs covered by the Consolidated Plan.

Substantial Plan Amendments

Substantial changes to the Consolidated Plan and/or Action Plan may include, but are not limited to the following circumstances:

1. a change in excess of \$400,000;
2. a substantial change in allocation priorities or a change in the method of distribution of funds;
3. an activity not previously described in the Plan will be carried out; or,
4. a substantial change in the primary purpose, or scope of an activity, such as intended beneficiaries or organizational support.

To seek input prior to implementing any substantial change, a notice of the change will be published in the local newspaper and on the Baltimore County website at least thirty days before the implementation of the change. Written comments will be considered during the thirty-day public display and comment period. A summary of any comments received will be attached to the substantial amendment.

The amendment will be submitted to HUD within thirty days following the end of the public display and comment period.

Minor Plan Amendments

Changes to the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan that do not meet the level of a substantial amendment are considered a minor amendment. Activities included under this category are entered into IDIS, tracked according to HUD requirements, and reported on as part of the year-end CAPER.

Emergency Amendments

Occasionally, as in the case of a natural disaster or public health crisis, like a hurricane or pandemic, it may become necessary for Baltimore County to request a substantial amendment to its Consolidated Plan or Action Plan. During these times, the County may need to alter its method and timeframe for gaining public participation. The County may request, and HUD may approve, a waiver or reduction in the amount of days required for public notice and/or public comment; the need for public hearings held virtually rather than in person or not to have a hearing at all if warranted due to the nature of the emergency; and the need to only post the Plan on a government website instead of in libraries or a newspaper, if appropriate to the emergency. If approved by HUD, the County will follow HUD's direction with no need to follow normal notice to the public or public comment requirements. Emergency amendments will be posted on the County's website and any activities undertaken as a result of an emergency amendment will comply with the purchasing/granting procedures required by HUD and the County in place during the course of the emergency. Activities included as part of any Emergency Amendment are still entered into IDIS, tracked according to HUD requirements, and reported on as part of the year-end CAPER.

Complaints

Unresolved complaints related to the Consolidated Plan, Action Plan, amendments and performance reports should be submitted in writing to the Director of the Department of Planning. Reasonable effort is made to provide responses within 15 working days after a complaint has been received. If a response is not completed within said time frame, the appropriate individual will be contacted and provided an explanation for the delay.

Technical Assistance

Technical assistance is provided by the Baltimore County upon request to the following groups in order to increase meaningful citizen participation and to foster community collaboration:

- Representatives of low- and moderate-income persons, so they may participate in planning, implementing, and assessing the program.
- Representatives of low- and moderate-income persons and neighborhood, which request assistance in developing proposals and statements of views
- Organizations proposing to provide services to the homeless and other special needs populations

Citizen Participation Plan Contact Information

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