

Citizen Participation Plan

The City of Chicopee receives funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for the following programs on annual basis: Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME). For the HOME program, the City is a member of the Consortium including the Cities of Holyoke and Westfield. Accordingly the City of Chicopee will to the maximum extent feasible coordinate Citizen Participation activities with these two Participating members. The City is also slated to receive COVID-19 funds. The CPP has been modified to reflect the urgency to meet extensive community need and to adhere to public health mandates.

These programs, which are administered by the Office of Community Development, provide formula grant support to the City of Chicopee to maintain or develop viable communities through the provision of decent housing, creation of a suitable living environment and expanded economic opportunities for low- and moderate-income persons. As a recipient of these program funds, HUD requires the City of Chicopee to produce the following documents:

- Consolidated Plan – a five-year plan that documents Chicopee’s housing and community development needs, outlines strategies to address those needs, and identifies proposed program accomplishments.
- Annual Action Plan – an annual plan that describes specific CDBG and HOME funded projects that will be undertaken over the course of the upcoming fiscal year.
- Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER) – an annual report that evaluates the use of federal funds during the prior year.

Chicopee’s Citizen Participation Plan aims to involve citizens in all aspects of the development of the Consolidated Plan, the Action Plan, any amendments to those plans, and the performance report. Consultations with key organizations providing housing and services, collaboration with non-profit agencies and networks as well as hearings accessible to all citizens provide opportunities for community input. Alternative means of soliciting input are continuously being evaluated and implemented.

Targeted outreach developed specifically for informing low- and moderate-income persons, particularly those residing in the neighborhoods targeted for assistance, minorities, residents of public and other affordable housing, and persons with disabilities will take place via distribution of notices to providers of services to these populations.

The City of Chicopee will hold at least two public annual hearings at different times of year. Information about the time, location, and subject of each hearing will be provided to citizens at least two weeks in advance. Given the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and required social distancing, the City is seeking alternative ways to engage residents in the planning process.

City of Chicopee

Citizen Participation Plan

REASONABLE NOTICE AND AVAILABILITY

The City of Chicopee provides citizens with reasonable notice of the opportunity to comment on the Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plan, CAPER and Substantial Amendments to the Consolidated Plan. The City of Chicopee notifies groups serving low- and moderate income residents of public hearings and forums and publishes information about the hearings on its website.

INFORMATION TO BE PROVIDED

- A.** The following information was made available to the public:
- the amount of assistance the City expects to receive;
 - the range of activities to be undertaken;
 - method by which funds will be distributed;
 - schedule for the development of the Consolidated Plan;
 - the amount of assistance that will benefit low, very low, and extremely low income persons; and
 - plans to minimize the displacement of persons and the assistance to be provided any persons displaced.
- B.** Traditionally, the City had given 30day public comment period for the Consolidated Plan, the Annual Action Plan, and any amendment. No Performance Report (CAPER) shall be submitted to HUD prior to the expiration of a 15-day comment period following notification. Given the waivers provided to permit communities to respond quickly to the COVID 19 pandemic, the City is restricting its public comment period for the Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plan, and any amendments.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH, PUBLIC HEARINGS AND MEETINGS

The City continued its community outreach process in order to increase resident and organization input.

- A.** A Citizen Participation mailing list is maintained by OCD. The list includes interested individuals and organizations affected by OCD programs covered in the Consolidated Plan. Any person or organization may be added to the list by written request to the OCD or the Office of the Mayor. Notices of public hearings will be mailed, faxed or emailed to persons on the Citizen Participation list. Notices of other meetings and other information will be mailed as deemed relevant by the OCD.
- B.** Neighborhood meetings, focus groups and surveys include methodology undertaken to encourage involvement in the setting of priorities and the development of the Consolidated Plan and each Annual Action Plan.
- C.** The OCD conducts public hearings to obtain citizen views. At least one hearing shall occur during each of the review periods: one for comments on the DRAFT Annual Plan and another for the annual performance review.

The hearings shall collectively address the following subjects:

Citizen Participation Plan

- housing and community development needs;
- development of the proposed Action Plan; and
- program performance.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, public hearings are streamed live on the City's website and Facebook page. The City will use this methodology to solicit input on public need and the proposed activities.

D. Notices

1. *Public Hearings*: In order to give adequate notice of public hearings, the OCD will publish a notice or a news story that provides details of the availability of the draft, links to posting of video-taped presentation, and of the opportunity to comment. When not constrained by a public health order, the City will conduct public hearings at times and locations so to maximize citizen participation.

COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

- A. Oral or written comments from residents and organizations shall be considered in preparing the Final Consolidated Plan, any amendment to the plan, the Annual Action Plan, any amendment to the AP, or the performance reviews. A summary of the comments and the disposition thereof will be included with the relevant document when submitted to HUD.
- B. Written complaints concerning the Consolidated Plan, an amendment to the plan, the Annual Action plan, Amendment to the AP, or a performance review shall be responded to in writing by the OCD within fifteen (15) working days whenever practical.

AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSOLIDATED PLAN AND/OR ANNUAL ACTION PLAN

- A. An amendment to the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan will be required in order to:
 1. Carry out an activity with funds covered by the Plan that was not previously described in the Action Plan, or
 2. Substantial change in an activity described in the Action Plan:
 - a. An increase/decrease in funds to an activity that is deemed significant.
 - b. A change in the purpose, scope, location or beneficiaries of an activity if such change is deemed to constitute a new activity not previously listed in the Action Plan.
 - c. A change in the method of distributing funds if the alternate method is not provided for in the Citizen Participation Plan.
- B. An amendment to the Consolidated or Annual Action Plan requires:
 1. Public notice of the availability of the amendment by publishing a summary in local newspapers and holding a public hearing.

Citizen Participation Plan

2. A thirty (30) day comment period to afford citizens the opportunity to comment. In nationally declared emergencies, where HUD and the City share the goal of expediting a community response the comment period shall be reduced to 5 days.
3. OCD consideration of all comments.
4. OCD must summarize the comments and the disposition thereof and submit the amendment and summary to HUD prior to implementing amendment.

ACCESS TO RECORDS

The OCD shall provide interested parties with reasonable and timely access to information and records relating to the jurisdiction's Consolidated Plan and use of assistance under programs covered by the Plan during the previous three (3) years. Access to other records will be made consistent with applicable local, state and federal disclosure policies. Document will also be available on the City's website for the entire review period.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The OCD will provide technical assistance to group representatives of lower income persons and low income neighborhood interests. Such assistance shall include:

- responding to questions about program requirements;
- explaining the process by which assistance is distributed; and
- identifying parts of a proposal that need improvement.

.

ANTI-DISPLACEMENT AND RELOCATION

It is the policy of the City of Chicopee to consider whether displacement will occur as a result of federally-assisted projects and to take steps to mitigate the impact of the displacement, if any. Steps include: considering whether displacement will occur during feasibility determinations; identifying potential relocation workload and resources early; assuring, whenever possible, that residential occupants of buildings rehabilitated are offered an opportunity to return; planning rehabilitation projects to include "staging" to eliminate temporary displacement; following notification procedures so that families do not leave because they are not informed about planned projects or their rights

When a project does require relocation, in order to ensure the timely issuance of notices to displaced households, etc., staff of the Community Development Department will ensure that all notices are sent in compliance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 (URA).

Citizen Participation Plan

Temporary relocation often occurs as the result of lead abatement and other rehabilitation activities in renter- and owner-occupied units. The City of Chicopee will consider requests for temporary relocation assistance.