



Jefferson County, Alabama Citizens' Participation Plan

The Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 became law in August 1974. In October 1977, President Carter signed the Housing and Community Development Act of 1977, which amended the 1974 Act. However, the objective of the legislation remains, as before, to develop viable urban communities, by expanding economic opportunities and providing decent housing and a suitable living environment, principally for persons of low and moderate income. Another equally important objective is to help elderly groups and disabled persons.

Jefferson County is eligible to participate in the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program under a special provision for "Urban Counties." Urban Counties are those with a minimum population of 200,000 persons or more. In order to meet the population requirement, a consortium of thirty Jefferson County cities was assembled, excluding the cities of Birmingham, Bessemer, County-Line, West Jefferson and Hoover. They are as follows:

Adamsville	Hueytown	Mulga
Brighton	Irondale	Pleasant Grove
Brookside	North Johns	Sylvan Springs
Cardiff	Kimberly	Tarrant
Center Point	Leeds	Trafford
Clay	Lipscomb	Trussville
Fairfield	Fultondale	Maytown
Vestavia Hills	Gardendale	Midfield
Warrior	Graysville	Morris
Homewood	Pinson	Mountain Brook
West Jefferson	Hoover	

The Community Development Block Grant program has been operating in Jefferson County since 1976, the Emergency Shelter Grant program since 1989, and the HOME program since 1992. These programs are part of a consolidated planning and application process and they require a written Citizen Participation Plan. This Plan describes the process for involving citizens in the establishment and priorities of needs for the expenditure of funds, and the preparation of the Consolidated Plan and Action Plan.

The Consolidated Plan began with the 1995 Program Year. The applications for CDBG, HOME, ESG, as well as other Federal programs the County participates in, are included in one application. The Consolidated Plan\Action Plan also has specific citizen participation requirements which, "...are designed to encourage participation by very low, and low-income persons, particularly those living in slum and blighted areas, and in areas where CDBG funds are proposed to be used. Jurisdictions are expected to take whatever actions are appropriate to encourage the participation of all of its citizens, including minorities and non-English speaking persons, as well as persons with mobility, visual or hearing impairments."

To accomplish this, the regulations require that:

- 1) Information on the program be supplied to citizens,
- 2) That at least two different public hearings be held during the Consolidated Planning Process, and
- 3) That citizens have an opportunity to comment on the County's Consolidated Plan\Action Plan and on the County's performance with the County responding to citizen comments.

Introduction

The Office of Community Development is the management arm of the Jefferson County Commission for all matters associated with the CDBG, HOME, and ESG programs. It provides, through close coordination and cooperation with the Commission and citizens, the means for developing plans, implementing projects, and analyzing performance of the programs.

Each municipality in the consortium will be requested to designate an Advisory Council member to meet with the Office of Community Development and make recommendations about the planning process. Persons from unincorporated areas of the County and non-profit organizations will also be invited to participate in this process. This group will be known as the Technical Advisory Committee. It will meet at least twice during a Program Year. The primary purpose of this group will be to advise the Office of Community Development. They will have no funding authority. All applications for financial assistance from an incorporated municipality, which involves construction activities, will have to be coordinated through the mayor. Unincorporated areas may submit applications directly to the Office of Community Development.

Public Hearings

In addition to the two Technical Advisory Committee meetings, Jefferson County will hold public hearings at two different times during the Consolidated Plan\Action Plan process. The first series of meetings will be held early in the planning stage and the last series will be held before the publication of a summary of the proposed plan in local newspapers.

Public hearings are normally held at the Jefferson County Office of Community Development during working hours, but as a special case, may be held at various locations around the County to give more citizens the opportunity to attend. The County will make arrangements to accommodate any citizens who are physically challenged.

Housing Authorities

The County shall work with area Housing Authorities to encourage the participation of residents of public and assisted housing developments in the Consolidated\Action Plan process. The County shall also provide information to the housing agencies about housing and community development plan activities related to its developments and surrounding communities so that the housing agency can make this information available at any public hearing required under the Public Housing program.

Topics of Meetings and Hearings

The meetings shall address housing and community development needs, development of proposed activities, and in at least one series of meetings, to review program performance. The hearings are to obtain the views of citizens on housing and community development needs, including priority non-housing community development needs.

Provision of information involves three distinct requirements:

1. Provision of program information;
2. Disclosure of program records; and,
3. Publication of notices concerning the Consolidated/Action Plan, the Annual Performance Reports, and the Citizen Participation Plan.

Provision of Program Information

At each public hearing Jefferson County will make available to citizens and public agencies, information on the amount of Federal assistance and the number of years the County expects to receive it, the range of eligible activities, a summary of past activities, and the number of activities that will benefit low-, very low-, and extremely low-income persons.

Disclosure of Program Records

Jefferson County will maintain at all times information and records on the Consolidated/Action Plan and the use of assistance for the previous five years. This information will be available for public review at the Jefferson County Office of Community Development. However, some records, such as applications, deal with personal income and other information on individuals, and must therefore be kept confidential. With the exception of these, all records of program activity are available for review at the Office of Community Development during normal working hours. The Citizen Participation Plan and the Consolidated/Action Plan will be available in printed form.

Public Notification of Program Action

Notice of the public hearings for the Consolidated/Action Plan process will be publicized in a manner appropriate to the area where the hearing will be held, and can include posting of notices locally, radio and television public service announcements, announcements to local churches, and mailed notices. Notification will also be sent to participating local governments. All notifications shall contain an explanation of the subject and scope of the hearings at least ten (10) days prior to the public hearing.

Availability of the Draft Consolidated/Action Plan

A summary of the Draft Consolidated/Action Plan will be published in at least one local newspaper of general circulation and one minority newspaper prior to the final series of public hearings on the Plans. Notification that the County will accept comments on the plan for 30 days will also be included in the publication. The publication will include a listing of public hearings to be held on the draft, as well as their times and locations. Notification will be made of the availability of the complete plan for public review at the Jefferson County Office of Community Development and at least seven public libraries whose locations are geographically dispersed throughout the County.

The adopted Consolidated/Action Plan, any amendments to the Plan, and the Annual Performance Report will be available to the public at the Office of Community Development.

Grantee Performance Report

Notification of the availability of the Annual Grantee Performance Report shall be published in at least one newspaper of general circulation and at least one minority newspaper. The report will be available at the Office of Community Development. Comments will be accepted on the Plan for a period of 15 days following the publication of the notice.

Citizen Participation Plan

Jefferson County shall publish the proposed Citizen Participation Plan in a newspaper of general circulation and one minority newspaper and send notification of its availability to area governments and such non-profit organizations and citizens groups as it deems appropriate. The Plan shall be available in the Jefferson County Office of Community Development in printed form. The County will receive comments on the Plan for a period of 30 days after the publication of the Plan.

Relocation Information

The County will seek to minimize the displacement of persons. If displacement is to occur, the affected persons will be notified of the type and levels of assistance available prior to the County taking any action on the displacement. Any actions will be accomplished in accordance with the Uniform Relocation Act, as amended.

Technical assistance will be provided to non-profit organizations and citizens' groups representing low, very low, and extremely-low income people in preparing applications for funding under the programs covered in the County's Consolidated/Action Plan.

The reasons for which any technical assistance will be provided are:

- 1) To aid groups of low and very low-income persons and groups residing in blighted neighborhoods to prepare proposals and statements of views; or
- 2) To provide assistance to non-profit groups that serve low and very low-income groups to prepare proposals.

Provision of technical assistance will not be a guarantee of funding. To obtain assistance, requests must be made to the Jefferson County Office of Community Development within the Open Season date and/or the published cut-off time for application submission. The Jefferson County Commission will have final decision on the funding of any specific project that meets program eligibility.

Jefferson County will consider all comments or views received and respond to all written inquiries and written complaints on the Citizen Participation Plan, the Consolidated/Action Plan and any substantial amendments to the Plans, and the Annual Performance Report. Response will be made within fifteen (15) working days of receipt of the comments. In cases where the address is not known of the person commenting, responses will remain on file at the Office of Community Development.

Complaints

Jefferson County will accept complaints and criticisms on the CDBG, HOME, and ESG programs, the Consolidated/Action Plans, amendments and the Performance Report at any time. The County will respond to any written citizen complaint within fifteen (15) working days from the time of receipt. The procedure for responding to criticisms of the Program will be handled as follows:

Complaints and grievances may be filed by any individual or group, a municipality, the County Commission, the Office of Community Development, the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development's Area Office, and any agency of the Federal Government, any member of Congress, or the Office of the President. Regardless of the origin of the complaint, or the first point of filing, it shall be reduced to writing, then based upon origin, it will be returned to the local government having direct jurisdiction.

If the complaint is based on a matter involving the Jefferson County CDBG Program or other Consolidated/Action Plan Programs, the Office of Community Development, must be notified, and will coordinate the local review and possible resolution of the complaint or grievance. Upon notification, the Office will insure that a complete and accurate response is made to the complainant within fifteen (15) days to discuss the matter. The major responsibility of the Office is to determine the functional and legal origins of the complaint, to address the validity of each, and to verify the geographical origin.

Complaints arising in municipalities in the Consortium, and particularly those which involve direct concern with municipal policy or administration shall be initially handled at the municipal level, with the assistance of the Office of Community Development. Should the complaints not be resolved at that level, the matter shall be referred to the County Commission. A complete record of correspondence, meetings, and research information shall be forwarded to the Commission upon referral. It shall not be the policy of the Office of Community Development to deal with complaints without the knowledge and direct involvement of local elected officials having jurisdiction, but the Office will provide staff support and technical assistance during the local review in a city or in the County.

If, after review and investigation at each level, the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome or does not voluntarily withdraw the complaint, he or she may proceed to the next level or other forms of relief.

Internal Complaint Procedure

All complainants shall be directed to the office of the Director of Jefferson County's Office of Community Development. The Director's office will direct the complaint to the appropriate division or office. The appropriate office shall respond to the complaint and notification shall be sent to the Director's Office that shall include a copy of the response.

Criteria for Substantial Amendments

Amendments to the Consolidated/Action Plan: Jefferson County shall amend its Consolidated/Action Plan whenever a proposed activity is to be undertaken that is not covered by the Consolidated/Action Plan, or included in the approved Action Plan.

Procedures for Amendments: The proposed amendment shall be published in a local newspaper of general circulation and the County shall receive comments for a period of thirty days. The County shall also provide appropriate units of local government with notification of the proposed change. The following CDBG, ESG, and HOME activities shall constitute a “Substantial Amendment:”

1. Addition of a new activity or project not previously described in its Consolidated or Action Plan;
2. Deletion of an activity or project previously described in its Consolidated or Action Plan;
3. Change in the purpose, scope, location or beneficiaries of an activity or project previously described in its Consolidated or Action Plan;
4. Change in the use of CDBG funds from one eligible activity or project to another previously described in its Consolidated or Action Plan;
5. Change in an activity or project (previously described in its Consolidated or Action Plan); and/or
6. ***Total dollar amount allocated*** or budgeted by more than 25 percent.

Amendments to CDBG-DR Action Plans

As the program for CDBG-DR progresses Jefferson County may be required to make changes to this CDBG-DR Action Plan. If any substantial changes are needed such as a change in program benefit or eligibility criteria; the allocation or re-allocation of more than \$1 million; or the addition or deletion of an activity Jefferson County will prepare a Substantial Amendment to the CDBG-DR Action Plan and follow the required CDBG-DR Citizens’ Participation process to provide for a reasonable public notice, review, and and seven (7)-day comment period on the proposed changes prior to submittal to HUD.

If any non-substantial changes are needed Jefferson County will notify HUD at least five days before the amendment becomes effective. Jefferson County is not required to undertake a public comment period for non-substantial amendments. However, all amendments to the Action Plan (substantial and non-substantial) will be numbered sequentially and posted on Jefferson County’s website www.jccal.org.

Use of the Citizen Participation Plan

Jefferson County shall follow the Citizen Participation Plan in the development of the Consolidated and Action Plans, the Amendments to those Plans, and for the Performance Reports.