

# ESSEX COUNTY

## Division of Housing & Community Development



# Citizen Participation Plan



**AMENDMENTED PLAN**

**April 29, 2020**

## **ESSEX COUNTY DIVISION OF HOUSING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

In accordance with the National Affordable Housing Act of 1992, the Division of Housing and Community Development considers the Citizen Participation component to be integral to the Consolidated Planning process. Although the County places particular emphasis on participation from residents of low and moderate-income areas, the programs and projects that are initiated as a result of the Consolidated Plan benefit all County residents. Therefore, all citizens are encouraged to participate in the development of the 2019 One Year Action Plan. Additionally, the County includes the Township of Bloomfield in this process because of their involvement in the HOME consortium.

To meet these requirements, the Division of Housing and Community Development has prepared the following Citizen Participation Plan outlining the Division's objectives and how they will be accomplished.

I. Objective: To provide citizens with information concerning the range of eligible activities, applications, and program requirements.

1. Week of October 29, 2018 notification for the submission of applications was given to:
  - a. All Community Development Representatives as elected by the participating municipalities.
  - b. All Public Service Agencies that have participated in the program previously
  - c. Advertisements for applications were be placed in local papers and posted on the County's website.
2. Deadline for submission of 2019 applications was 4:00 PM on December 20, 2018.

II. Objective: Provide for and encourage citizen participation, with particular emphasis on participation by persons of low and moderate income who are residents of slum and blighted areas and of areas in which funds are proposed to be used, and provides for participation of residents in low and moderate income neighborhoods as defined by the local jurisdiction.

Implementation:

1. The Essex County Division of Housing & Community Development will hold monthly meetings of all Committee Development Representatives. These meetings are scheduled for the third Thursday of each month.
2. The Essex County Division of Housing & Community Development will hold two public hearings. The location of these hearings will be at the Salvation Army, Montclair. This will allow equal opportunity for all county residents to attend.

The locations for the 2019 Program Year will be:

Fall: The Salvation Army  
13 Trinity Place  
Montclair, NJ  
Date: October 29, 2018  
Time: 6:00 PM

Spring: The Salvation Army  
13 Trinity Place  
Montclair, NJ  
Date: June 10, 2019  
Time: 6:00 PM

Notice of Countywide public hearings will be handled as follows:

- a. A letter of invitation will be sent to the following:
  - Community Development Representatives
  - The Mayor of the participating municipality
  - the Directors of the Service Agencies
  - Emergency Shelter Representatives
  - Home Investment Partnership Program recipients
- b. An advertisement will be placed in the legal section of the Star Ledger and local papers as well as the County website <http://www.essex-countynj.org/>
- c. Notices will be placed in various buildings throughout the municipalities by the Community Development Representatives (e.g. Library, police station, municipal building).

Notice of Municipal Hearings will be handled as follows:

- a. A notice must be published in the local paper advertising two public hearings to be held in the municipality prior to the December 2018 municipal application submission deadline.
- b. Community Development Representatives will place notices in various buildings throughout the municipality encouraging local citizen participation.

The hearings are designed to enable citizens to comment on all aspects of the Community Development Programs. Therefore, the citizen comment portion is the largest of all components of the hearing. The Division of Housing & Community Development within a reasonable amount of time will provide response to all written grievances and proposals. This period shall not exceed thirty (30) days from receipt of the written comment.

1. The municipality will notify all residents of the project area at least one week before construction begins.
2. Direct Mailing
3. Posters in the project area.

If the nature of the project warrants, (determined by Essex County Community Development), the individual municipality will hold a meeting with all concerned citizens. Minutes of these meetings will be kept on file at the Town Hall and Essex County Division of Housing & Community Development.

III. Objective: To provide citizens with reasonable and timely access to local meetings, information, and records relating to the grantee's proposed use of funds as required by the regulations of the Secretary and relating to the actual use of funds under the Act.

1. Public Hearings:
  - A public notice appears in the local papers at least fifteen (15) days prior to the scheduled date of the public hearing.
  - An invitation is sent to all Community Development Representatives, Mayors and agency and company representatives at least two (2) weeks before the scheduled date of the Spring and Fall Public Hearings.
  - A follow-up telephone call is placed to each municipality, agency and company within one (1) week prior to the scheduled date of the hearing.
2. Community Development Representative Meetings:
  - Meetings are scheduled for the third Thursday of each month.
  - A reminder is sent to the Representatives, Mayor and clerk of each municipality.
  - Minutes of each meeting are kept on file at the Division of Housing and Community Development within three (3) weeks following the meeting for public access and review.
  - Minutes from each meeting are e-mailed to all representatives and agencies and are reviewed at the beginning of the next meeting. These minutes are also kept on file at the Division of Housing & Community Development and the municipalities for public access and review.
3. Public Accessing of Information:
  - All information regarding Community Development programs is on file at the:

Division of Housing & Community Development  
Kip's Castle Park  
20 Crestmont Road  
Verona, New Jersey 07044

The proposed Essex County Consolidated Plan Objectives and Proposed Use of Funds is published fifteen (15) days prior to the second public hearing. This Statement is also presented to all persons in attendance at the hearing. Additional copies are available upon request from the Division of Housing and Community Development.

4. Submission of the Consolidated Plan to HUD:

- A fifteen (15) day comment period follows the public hearing. During this time, all responses to citizen comments are prepared. Upon completion of this period, the 2019 One Year Action Plan and Use of Funds is submitted to HUD.

**Emergency Situations Provision**

**In the event of an emergency, such as the county is in a location covered by a major disaster declaration made under Title IV of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act). The county will follow guidance provided by the HUD Office of the Secretary for Community Planning and Development. This includes shortening of the public notice requirements and comment period for substantial amendments to a Consolidated Plan or Action Plan, virtual public hearings and submissions to the local CPD field office. This also includes the posting of all public notices which may allow for posting on the county website as opposed to a paper of general circulation.**

IV. Objective: To provide technical assistance to groups representing low and moderate-income persons who request assistance.

1. The Division of Housing and Community Development's staff is available to any person or group requesting assistance. The following areas of expertise is provided upon request:

- Housing
- Public Improvements
- Public Facilities
- Environmental Reviews
- Application Submission

2. Technical assistance is available at, but not restricted to, the Division of Housing and Community Development's offices at Kip's Castle Park (Carriage House), 20 Crestmont Road, Verona, New Jersey 07044.

3. Notification for the availability of technical assistance is made via letter or e-mail to each requesting person or group.

V. Objective: To conduct public hearings to obtain citizen views and respond to proposals and questions at all stages of the Consolidated Plan development process, including, but not limited to, identification of needs, review of proposed activities, and evaluation of program performance.

Implementation:

1. The Division of Housing and Community Development holds at least two (2) public hearings each program year. The first Hearing is held to discuss the application process and the development of the Consolidated Plan. The second public hearing is held to discuss the Plan, including the Proposed Use of Funds. Additional public hearings may be scheduled when the Division substantially amends the action plan. The County must notify HUD of a substantial amendment to the Action plan. The Division will notify the public of availability of reprogrammed funds via a public notice in the Star Ledger and the County's website as well as announcing reprogrammed fund availability at the monthly Community Development Representative's meeting.

Notification of these hearings is handled as follows:

- Advertisements are published in the local papers at least fifteen (15) days prior to the scheduled date.
- Invitations are sent to each Community Development Representative and clerk for each of the participating municipalities. Participating service providers also receive an invitation.

The Division of Housing and Community Development will post the consolidated plan on the Essex County website and ensure that it is available at the 18 Essex County Consortium municipalities, as well as the Division of Community Action, the ARC of Essex County and the Mental Health Association of Essex & Morris, Inc.

2. The Division of Housing and Community Development holds monthly Community Development meetings to discuss program performance. This forum allows for the discussion and dissemination of any existing or future HUD regulations or information that is pertinent to the County and the implementation of the CDBG programs.

The location of these meetings will be held at Verona Park Boat House in Verona and on occasion at various sites throughout the consortium to permit the public complete access to the information that will be disseminated including the County website.

3. The Division of Housing and Community Development also holds individual meetings with the representatives from each municipality. At these meetings, municipalities receive information regarding their funding and current program evaluations. These meetings are scheduled to begin during the first week of January. During these meetings, the following items are discussed:

- a. the town's funding and project implementation history.
- b. 2019 applications
  - Documentation
  - Project evaluation
  - Timely expenditure of funds
  - Current Policy and Procedures

In some cases, supportive documentation is requested. This information is then added to the current municipalities' application and kept on file at the Division for public reference.

## VI. Objective:

To provide a timely written answer to written complaints and grievances, within thirty (30) calendar days where practical.

### Implementation:

1. Documented complaints and grievances are responded to, in writing, within thirty (30) calendar days from the receipt of the complaint.
2. If written responses cannot be offered within thirty (30) calendar days, notification is made to the complainant in writing. This notification will estimate the approximate time frame for a response to be issued.

## VII. Objective

To provide program information to persons with special needs including, but not limited to, non-English speaking persons, deaf persons, blind or sight impaired persons, or persons with disabilities.

### Implementation:

1. An interpreter, who is fluent in Spanish, is available to provide assistance at the public hearings and technical assistance meetings. Based on current county demographics, the attendance of Spanish speaking residents is anticipated. Interpreters for other languages may be available upon prior request.
2. Interpreter assistance is available throughout the 2015-2019 Consolidated Plan 2019 One Year Action Plan process. (Prior notification to the Division is required.)
3. Hearing impaired persons will receive written material. All public hearings are transcribed to minutes and circulated throughout participating municipalities.
4. Transportation is provided for individuals with disabilities to and from public hearings and technical assistance meetings. All meetings are scheduled in barrier-free facilities. (Prior notification to the Division is required.)
5. Any additional needs are addressed on an individual basis.

Note: Additional citizen participation may be included by each municipality in their corresponding Citizen Participation Plans. However, UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES, may the municipality omit any provision in this plan.

## VIII. Amendments to the Action Plan

An amendment to the One-Year Action Plan is required when a substantial change is requested to the existing annual action plan submitted to HUD.

An amendment is required if:

1. If there is a substantial change in the scope of the activity.
2. If the cost increase is more than 20% of the established allocation of the activity.
3. If it is deemed necessary by the Division, due to unusual or extraordinary circumstances.

An amendment is not required if:

1. If the increase in costs is no more than 20% of the established allocation for an activity.
2. If a new eligible activity is identified by the County and the cost is less than 10% of the existing program year's allocation. The Division shall notify the public of this new activity via a posting on the County's website and ad in the Star-Ledger.
3. If a proposed change of scope is minor and reasonably consistent with the original scope of the activity.

Amendment Procedure for substantial changes to the One-Year Action Plan

1. 15-day public notice of availability of funds due to reprogramming.
2. Public Notice of proposed awards of reprogrammed funds and changes.
3. Public hearing on proposed award of funds and changes to existing action plan.
4. Public Comment period of 15 days.
5. Submit amendment to action plan with public comments to HUD.
6. Decision memo to the Board of Chosen Freeholders for approved amendments.
7. Approval by the Board of Chosen Freeholders.
8. New contracts entered into and signed by all responsible parties.
9. IDIS updated to reflect changes to the action plan.
10. Funding made available to the grantee through the provision of a purchase order by the Division of Accounts & Controls.

Activities can begin once all-applicable bidding requirements and environmental reviews have been performed.