

DRAFT

**FITCHBURG PLANNING BOARD PUBLIC HEARING
YEAR 45 CDBG PROGRAM APPLICANTS
MINUTES
JANUARY 24, 2019**

In Attendance:

PLANNING BOARD MEMBERS

Paula Caron, Chair
Paul Fontaine, Jr.
Michael Hurley
Peter Capodagli

COMMUNITY DEV/PLANNING STAFF

Tom Skwierawski
Liz Murphy
Cindy Dalton
Jacky Scribner
Mike O'Hara

CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS

Paul Beauchemin
Tom Donnelly
Sam Squailia

Paula Caron opened the meeting at 6:05 p.m. Paula explained the purpose of the CDBG hearing.

Twenty five (25) CDBG proposals were received totaling \$1,431,725.00 in requests. Approximately \$981,752.00 in Year 45 funds is estimated to be available. The CDBG schedule was explained to the audience. The schedule is as follows: the Planning Board will meet on February 12th to discuss the Year 45 proposals and make a recommendation to the Mayor. The Mayor will review the Planning Board's recommendations and submit his recommendations to the City Council for their review beginning February 27th and will vote March 19th. The proposed Consolidated Plan and Statement of CDBG activities will be published on March 31st. Public comments will be received up to the date of the second public hearing which is scheduled for May 1. Submission of the Year 45 Consolidated Plan -Action Plan is in May. The start-up of the new program year begins on July 1, 2018.

Tom Skwierawski, Executive Director of Community Development, referred applicants to the handouts provided in the application package that were also available at the meeting. The CDBG Program regulations were outlined. In order for a project to be eligible it must meet one of the three national objectives which include: benefitting persons of low-moderate income, eliminating slums and blight, or meeting an urgent need. Eligible activities include: public facilities, public services, demolition, economic development, rehab & preservation, planning & administration. For projects serving a low-moderate income area, at least 51% of the households must be at 80% median income or less. There is a 20% cap on planning and admin activities, and a 15% cap on public service activities. It is the city's responsibility to insure that at least 70% of CDBG funds are used to benefit low-moderate income persons over a three-year period. Tom thanked Jacky Scribner from Community Development for providing Spanish translation services.

Paula Caron explained some housekeeping rules and welcomed comments from the audience.

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND IMPROVEMENTS

PROJECT – SPONSOR **YEAR 45 REQUEST – YEAR 44 AWARD**

Mirror Lake Trail Loop Accessibility: Phase I – Fitchburg Disability Commission **Year 45 Request: \$60,000 – Year 44 Award: \$5,000 (for Sidewalk Accessibility)**

Project funds will be used to create an accessible loop around Mirror Lake in two phases. Phase I will create an over water boardwalk following the shoreline to connect the street sidewalks to the Gazebo, eliminating the need to use the stone stairs and walkway to access the Gazebo and Bandstand. This project meets the needs of the Five Year plan's NA-50 Non-Housing Community Development Needs to explain the limited open space and recreational areas by creating an accessible trail.

Basil Tolos, Disability Commission Chairman, spoke to the need for a boardwalk as a means for people in wheelchairs to access the Gazebo as it is hard to get to the ramp.

Goodrich Playground Project: Phase II – Board of Parks Commissioners **Year 45 Request: \$50,000 – Year 44 Award: \$45,000 (for Phase I)**

Project funds will be used to remove existing fencing and backstops surrounding the baseball facilities at Goodrich Playground. New fencing will be installed, followed by leveling and grading of the diamond. This will be followed by the cutting and installation of clay for the infield. This investment improves a currently defunct section of the park that is overgrown, while also improving the aesthetic of the park and the quality of life within the Goodrich Street neighborhood. The work will be done by Fitchburg DPW and be ADA compliant.

Tom Skwierawski, Executive Director of Community Development, spoke to this application as being an extension of Yr. 44 Phase II of an ongoing capital improvement plan to address all CDBG eligible parks & playgrounds. Paula questioned the overall plan. Tom explained removal of tennis court and the plan to improve use of the field.

Crocker Field – Open Grandstand Rear Wall – City of Fitchburg School Department **Year 45 Request: \$9,000 Year 44 Award: \$8,000 (for removal/replacement of other walls)**

Project funds will be used to prepare final plans and specs, demolish 68 linear feet of concrete cap, and install 68 feet of new concrete cap, as well as construction contract administration and inspection.

Pete Steven, Fitchburg School Committee, thanked the board members for what they have done in previous years. Pete spoke in support of this proposal to improve Crocker Field. Robert Jokela, Superintendent of schools, explains that the School Department had partnered with the City of Fitchburg on previous Crocker Field projects, and would continue to do so with the three applications submitted for funding. He noted that the poverty rate in the area is high, and that the park is used primarily by the people in the neighborhood.

Crocker Field – Field House Roof: Phase II – City of Fitchburg School Department
Year 45 Request: \$33,000 – Year 44 Award: N/A

Project funds will be used to prepare final plans and specs; furnish and install 55 linear feet of copper gutters; furnish and install 36 feet of downspouts and collector pipes; clean out clogged underground drainage system; replace wood trim; scrape, sand and paint copper trim; and for contract administration.

Pete Stevens, Fitchburg School Committee, spoke to this application. Funds would be used for gutters and to finish up the job.

Crocker Field – Restore Grandstand Benches – City of Fitchburg School Department
Year 45 Request: \$9,000 – Year 44 Award: N/A

Project funds will be used to remove, replace, and paint hazardous and rotting wood benches in the first three rows of the covered grandstand, totaling 24 benches, the dimensions of which are approximately 8' x 11.5" x 2.5". The work will be completed by the Fitchburg DPW.

No questions or comments.

Streetscape Improvements – Community Development Department
Year 45 Request: \$175,000 – Year 44 Award: \$158,905

Project funds will be used to design, install or replace sidewalks, curb-cuts, fencing, lighting, plantings or other streetscape, infrastructure, or accessibility improvements along City Gateways, North of Main or other strategic locations. Funds may support or be used as a match for other funding under the city's Complete Streets program or be used to apply and provide design or match for the next round of MassWorks Public Infrastructure grant program.

Tom Skwierawski spoke in support of this application. Funds will be used to leverage larger grant opportunities. He reviewed the Complete Streets and MassWorks programs and the need for matching funding being available for projects. Paul Fontaine asked what specific projects were being earmarked and Tom Skwierawski explained that the Complete Streets plan determines locations. John DiPasquale asked how this proposal was different from the Sidewalk Accessibility project submitted by Disability Commission and Tom Skwierawski explained that they are not mutually exclusive. Mike Hurley questioned the request of \$60,000 when there was no specific plan, and inquired about brick sidewalks and flashing signals for the Library.

Paula Caron asked for a list of projects to detail the scope of the application.

Tom referred to infrastructure improvements for Main Street, and said that there the sidewalk repairs may need to be a made of a more sustainable material than brick. Some crosswalks will be upgraded, including pedestrian crossing signals. The Board asked about the Centro application for High Speed Internet, and if that infrastructure could be funded in another way, and if it would benefit the City Hall Campus project. AJ Tourigny explained that the City is trying to work with Centro to reduce overall costs and make sure that street only has to be ripped up once. There is a conduit for High Speed Internet on the Fitchburg State side of the building, but the location of One Wood Place is not on the side of City Hall that needs access.

Councilor Beauchemin pointed out that a petition was submitted 25 years prior to add sidewalks to Pratt Street, which currently has no sidewalks. He said that children cannot safely walk to school or to the park, and that people are afraid to walk down that street because of the traffic.

Tom referred to the Safe Routes to School grant program that helps provide safe walking infrastructure for neighborhoods near schools, and that Pratt Street would likely be a good candidate.

Middle Street Sidewalk – Fitchburg Department of Public Works
Year 45 Request: \$7,000 Year 44 Award: N/A

Project funds will be used to remove and replace 320 linear feet (by 5' wide) of concrete sidewalk and reset the granite curb, as required. This work will be completed by Fitchburg DPW.

Tom Skwierawski noted that this application came out of a petition from the City Council.

Connecting One Wood Place to High Speed Internet – CENTRO
Year 45 Request: \$24,725 – Year 44 Award: N/A

Project funds will be used to connect Centro's office at One Wood Place to high-speed internet. The facility is a 143-year-old, repurposed commercial building, and lacks sufficient internet speed. The office serves low- and moderate-income individuals and families. Of the three local carriers, Comcast/Xfinity is the only internet provider willing to work with Centro, and will cover approximately 30% of the cost.

Eileen Berger is the Grants Manager for Centro, which has two locations in Fitchburg. Centro provides services for the Spanish-speaking and immigrant community, which she notes is a growing population in Fitchburg. Centro purchased 435 Main Street, which has a storied history, seven years ago. The property had some improvements made prior to Centro purchasing the building, but lacks high-speed internet, which inhibits staff from being able to do their jobs efficiently. They have room for two offices to be rented out, which would bring in additional revenue, but they need high-speed internet to attract tenants. Verizon said that High Speed Internet would be coming at an undetermined time in the future, so they inquired with Comcast, would said it could be done soon and would be willing to pay about \$7,500 of the cost, which is approximately 30% of the cost of the project's total cost. Eileen believes that the Centro office will bring 5-10 new jobs to Fitchburg.

Paula Caron asked about the timeline, and Eileen responded that Comcast can move quickly. AJ noted that the project could not begin before April, but that once the project started, it would take about a week to complete the trenching. Grove Street has a box and hookup for Internet, and they are looking to bring High Speed Internet to City Hall, as well.

Sam Pawlak Community Playground – Judy Jollimore and Beth LeBlanc
Year 45 Request: \$125,000 – Year 44 Award: N/A

Project funds will be used to build an inclusive playground at Coolidge Park. This playground will be adjacent to existing play structures and would include handicap-accessible and sensory equipment, ground cover, signage, and a fence. The installation would be through a Community Build. The applicant has supplied cost estimates from M.E. O'Brien and Sons, Inc.

Beth LeBlanc and Judy Jollimore both work in the school system, specifically in Special Education. They note that there is a need for accessible playgrounds for children who are handicapped and able-bodied, special needs and typically-developed children, to play together. They want this playground to be a real community playground, and know that Coolidge is a great location. Judy provided visual aids to the Planning Board. Beth explains that they started fundraising in 2016, and have raised \$26,000 so far. The playground would include equipment for children in wheelchairs, and also sensory equipment appropriate for children on the autism spectrum. The plan is still developing, and the biggest expense is for the equipment itself. Appropriate ground cover is also an expense – playgrounds cannot use woodchips with this kind of equipment, and the cover has been specially chosen for safety and for use with the play structures to be purchased. Beth explains that people are ready to help, and that the playground would be a community build that is supervised by the builder.

Paula Caron asked if the project already had the support of the Parks Board, and Beth responded that it does. Paula commented that the project would be a great addition to Coolidge, and Paul Fontaine echoed the sentiment.

9 PROPOSALS – \$492,725

PUBLIC SERVICES

The Public Services category is subject to a 15% cap. Paul Fontaine notes that, if the projects are funded in full, about 75% of the applications could be funded within the constraint.

Street Homeless Intervention Program – Our Father’s House **Year 45 Request: \$28,000 – Year 44 Award: \$28,000**

Project funds will be used to pay staff salary for a 20 hour per week Street Outreach Worker solely dedicated to the homeless within the City of Fitchburg. Connections to health and social services, mental health and addiction services will be offered along with food, clothing, blankets, and human contact. Will work with Fitchburg PD and FD. In addition, \$8,000 would be available to pay for a chronically homeless persons first month’s rent only or one-time payment in order to enable individuals to acquire and live in permanent housing and off the streets.

Kevin MacLean explained that Our Father’s House serves 31 cities and towns, but that CDBG funding allows the agency to dedicate a staff person to serve Fitchburg exclusively. So far in Year 44, Street Outreach has spent 160 hours on the service. Kevin explained that Our Father’s House also fields calls from Sue Christensen and the Police Department, and works to help those people.

In addition to street outreach, \$8,000 is split into 16 mini-grants, which helps get people into apartments. Kevin explains that this money makes a huge difference when combined, with other funding, to get people off the streets.

Paula Caron thanks Kevin for his outreach work, and the work that Our Father’s House does in the community, noting that she has heard about their work from the Fitchburg Police Department.

Leona Whetzel, from MOC, noted that MOC works with Our Father’s House and that they do great work.

Cleghorn Center After School Program, Summer Camp, and Youth Business Incubator – MOC
Year 45 Request: \$60,000 – Year 44 Award: \$10,000

Program funds will be used to support youth services programming, including the After School Program, Summer Camp, and Youth Business Incubator. The After School program is primarily focused on academics, but includes supports for health and nutrition; civic engagement projects; computer literacy; workplace readiness and soft skills; and leadership skills. The Summer Camp primarily promotes literacy throughout the summer months, while including programming for STEM activities, arts and culture, and other youth development activities. The Youth Business Incubator teaches youth how to develop their ideas into viable business models, provides mentorship and coaching, access to technology, workshops, and a launch event. Funding supports the Director of Youth Services (16 hours/week), and a Youth Program Assistant (24 hours/week).

Leona Whetzel and Shana Fitz introduce themselves as the representatives from MOC. Leona explains that MOC has been managing the United Neighbors of Fitchburg for over two years, and that they are requesting funding so that MOC can continue running the program and improve the services. In addition to running the summer program again, the Center now offers meals to the youth, as well as ride services. MOC is collaborating with the Boys and Girls Club on the Business Incubator. The Cleghorn Center has about 60 youth enrolled.

Paul Beauchemin said that this is a good program, and that it is needed in the community.

Paula asked if the \$60,000 is being used for a staff position. Leona explained that the money supports the director of the program, and a youth program assistant.

Spartacus Program – Montachusett Regional YMCA
Year 45 Request: \$10,000 – Year 44 Award: \$10,000

Program funds will be used to support staff salary of the Teen Center Spartacus Program, offering services to at-risk youth between the ages of 13 and 18 who live in Fitchburg. Emphasis will be on Youth Development, Healthy Living, and Social Responsibility through physical fitness, team building, life skills training, community service, and outdoor activities. It is estimated that 50 youth (unduplicated count) will be served between September and June.

David Connor explains that the YMCA has been in North Central for 153 years and that the Spartacus program started in Worcester, as a program focused on the teen population, and has been successful. The YMCA has been reaching its goals, with 50 teens currently enrolled in the program. David thanked the Planning Board for the funding, and noted that the program had an increase in funding from Year 43 to Year 44. The program now offers meals; food insecurity has been an increasing issue for the families served.

Angaw Kahassai briefly explained the schedule for a typical day at the program, which includes sports, snacks, and focus groups with partner agencies and their Peer Leaders. Some of the youth enrolled in Spartacus go on to become employed as Peer Leaders at LUK or MOC.

David explained that program starts by working with youth on their behavior, and that academic achievement follows, with some students joining the Minority Achievers Program. One student recently announced their acceptance into several college.

Angaw tells the Board that the students are also volunteering with organization like NewVue Communities. The program helps them to become better students and citizens. They are getting involved in after-school activities. The youth in this program are all at-risk something, and the program is working to help them.

Drug Enforcement Patrol Program – Fitchburg Police Dept.
Year 45 Request: \$65,000 – Year 44 Award: \$60,000

Program funds will be used to provide for police overtime expenses related to drug investigation activities in the CDBG Strategy Area and foot/motorcycle/bicycle patrols in targeted CDBG areas. Police activities include narcotics investigations, surveillance, undercover buys, search warrant services, and arrests. CDBG funds will be used by the Drug Suppression Unit to conduct thorough investigations on mid- to high-level dealers in the City of Fitchburg, particularly targeting the heroin and opioid market in designated CDBG areas.

Chief Martineau starts by expressing thanks for the previous year's funding. He recaps the Department's successes from the past 6+ months, noting that the funding supports 4 full-time detectives working on drug/narcotic suppression, issuing 41 search warrants, completing 65 arrests for drug activity. The Department is focusing on Downtown with a Zero Tolerance Sweep for drug activity. While this took a significant manpower, sales plummeted after the sweep.

The Department is also working to engage the community, increasing their foot and bicycle patrols. This is not just about drugs; there are many other important outcomes from the patrols. The Department has completed over 100 hours of walking patrols.

Overdoses are down significantly from last year, and CDBG money is making this happen.

Paula Caron thanks Chief Martineau and the Department for their work.

Transportation Services to Afterschool Program, Project Learn STEAM –
Boys & Girls Club of Fitchburg and Leominster
Year 45 Request: \$16,000 – Year 44 Award: \$16,000

Program funds will be used to provide one-way transportation from Fitchburg schools to the Boys and Girls Club Afterschool Program located at 365 Lindell Street in Leominster. The Fitchburg schools include: Memorial, South Street, Reingold, Crocker, McKay, Longsjø, Sizer, and Fitchburg High School. It is estimated that approximately 1,440 transportation trips will be provided and 300 Fitchburg youth (unduplicated) served.

Donata Martin explained that the Boys and Girls Club serves youth ages 8-18, generally from 2-7pm. She noted several other programs to show the Club's diversity and innovation of programming. Donata remarked on the collaboration with MOC to run the t-shirt print shop, and pointed to their contract with Lands' End and the Johnny Appleseed Center.

There are currently 245 Fitchburg youth attending the program, out of over 600 total youth.

Peter Capodagli asked how Gardner fits into the program, and Donata explained that while Gardner falls under the same charter, the Gardner club is its own entity, with a separate budget and facility.

Mike Hurley said that he has received great feedback around the program, and thinks that \$16,000 is a great investment.

MIHN Family Housing/Family Pathways Project – Montachusett Interfaith Hospitality Network
Year 45 Request: \$10,000 – Year 44 Award \$8,000

Program funds will provide emergency housing for homeless families in North Worcester County, including case management and follow up services. It is estimated MIHN will screen 230 referrals during the year, and expects to serve 15 Fitchburg families (with children, unduplicated count) in the shelter and emergency services. The CDBG funds will be used to partially pay for the MIHN Operations Manager salary costs.

Jon Hogue expressed his thanks for prior year funding. While the shelter is located in Leominster, many of the families are from Fitchburg. About 70% of the families served successfully transitioned to self-sufficient family housing. MIHN works to help educate people and work on skill building for the adults. The shelter, which is the only family shelter in the area, can accommodate up to 5 families at one time, but the need is great. The shelter receives over 200 screening forms, which puts families on the wait list. A family might stay anywhere from 1-12 months. There are insufficient affordable apartments, especially for families with children.

The shelter is also working on developing the next project, which is the creation of supportive permanent housing units. MIHN is also changing its name, as it is cumbersome and not descriptive of the services provided.

Paula Caron asked about staffing, and Jon confirmed that the agency employed 3 staff members, but has over 300 volunteers who provide food and child care during agency trainings for parents.

Paul Beauchemin asked what the families do with their food stamps, if they are receiving food from the shelter. Jon answered that the shelter primarily provides dinner, and is a supplement to the families' food stamps. Families purchase their own breakfast and lunches, and have refrigerators in their spaces, which the shelter staff can monitor.

Paula Caron thanked Jon for their efforts, commenting that MIHN does much with little.

Fitchburg Homelessness Prevention Project – Community Legal Aid
Year 45 Request: \$20,000 – Year 44 Award: N/A

Program funds will be used to assist low-income and elderly tenants at risk of eviction or loss of housing subsidy, in order to help prevent homelessness. CLA will also take on cases related to housing that is in need of repair; CLA is able to assert legal claims that result in improvement to housing conditions, making the unit more livable for the tenant, and increases the quality of the City's housing stock. In 2018, in the Central Division of the Housing Court, 93.2% of tenants were underrepresented, compared to 33.4% of landlords. Funding will support part of a Staff Attorney and the Senior Supervising Attorney.

Faye Rachlin announced that Community Legal Aid will be opening a full-service office in Fitchburg for the first time in 20 years. The office will open by the end of March and be located on Main Street. Community Legal Aid provides lawyers free of charge for the poor and elderly to take on civil cases. CLA does not provide services for criminal cases. They specialize in cases regarding domestic violence, senior and disability benefits, unemployment, and housing (to solve issues regarding tenancy). CLA does much work regarding housing subsidies for the working poor, as market rates for apartments are a barrier.

The funding proposal would pay for part of the salary of lawyer who would do housing law in Fitchburg. This would help people avoid evictions, stabilize tenancies, and improve substandard housing. The agency is also working on doing outreach to the Asian population in Fitchburg, which is growing.

Paul Beauchemin asked for clarification around whether there would be a charge for the lawyer's services, and Faye responded that there is no charge for those who qualify; Community Legal Aid is not allowed to charge for their services. CLA receives funding from a variety of sources, including state and federal funds. Eligible persons fall under 125% of the poverty line.

Sam Squailia noted that as a City Councilor, she often hears long, personal stories of constituents in need of services like this, and is glad to know that these services will be available.

7 PROPOSALS – \$209,000

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Small Business Technical Assistance Program – NewVue Communities

Year 45 Request: \$25,000 – Year 44 Award: \$21,000

Program funds will provide outreach and technical assistance to businesses. This program leverages loans for small businesses. It is estimated that 40 businesses will be served (unduplicated count), 65 jobs will be created/retained, 43 businesses will be counseled, 4 loans with a value of \$100,000 total will be facilitated, and 26 business plans developed. Funds will be used to pay staff salary.

Marc Dohan said that NewVue appreciates the support in prior years, and that funding would be used to add a staff person and expand their services. NewVue is currently on-track to meet its goals, and is working on special outreach to build up the creative economy in Fitchburg.

Tom Skwierawski explained that the Community Development Department sends people to NewVue when they need help, or when they approach the Department with new ideas. It has been a great support. Marc notes that the IdeaLab has also brought interest to the program.

Downtown Mural Project – Fitchburg Community Development

Year 45 Request: \$25,000 – Year 44 Award: N/A

Program funds will be used to install 2-3 murals in the downtown area. The City will conduct an RFP process to solicit artists and designers interested in creating a mural for the downtown, and oversee the installation of said murals.

Tom Skwierawski explained that murals are an unconventional form of economic development, and would help to mark Downtown as a center of art and culture. This application is a stake in the ground to support the arts in Fitchburg, as well as act as part of the foundation of the Theater Block and other creative endeavors.

Paula Caron asked if the artists involved would be from Fitchburg. Tom replied that, while there would be a preference for Fitchburg artists, the pool would not be limited to Fitchburg.

Paul Caron asked if Cultural Council grants have been considered. Tom and Sam Squailia confirmed that the grants would be insufficient for a project of this size.

Peter Capodagli asked if Community Development would consider sculptures, as well as murals, and if the murals would be of similar size and scope as previous murals. Tom responded that the application was intended to fund murals, but that other types of public art haven't necessarily been discounted as possibilities. He confirmed that the murals would be of similar size and scope to their predecessors, and that some locations have been preliminarily identified.

Paula asked if the funding would cover the total costs of the murals proposed. Tom confirmed this, and noted that the funds might be able to be leveraged for additional public art. Peter Capodagli said he approved of the idea and asked Community Development to be open-minded about other types of art. Tom Donnelly reminded the Department that locations should be carefully considered to avoid controversy and maximize exposure of the art.

Fitchburg Downtown Coordinator – Fitchburg State University
Year 45 Request: \$30,000 – Year 44 Award: \$20,000 (for IdeaLab)

Program funds will be used hire a Downtown Coordinator. This position will assist in planning and coordinating Main Street projects and special events; assist in the development of a shared brand strategy for Downtown Fitchburg as both a college town and arts and culture destination. This position will support 15 community and cultural events, engage 75 businesses to participate in said events, help draw one new business and at least one pop-up retail business, and help draw 40,000 residents from the Greater Fitchburg region to local events. This funding will be used to support part of one FTE.

Tom Skwierawski explained that while this is a Fitchburg State University project, it is also a collaboration with ReImagine North of Main and TDI. CDBG has funded a position like this in the past. This position is something that the downtown businesses have been asking for, and the position would be responsible for helping to coordinate Downtown events, capacity support, and to help with the identity of cohesion of Downtown events. The Economic Development plan includes a Downtown Coordinator.

Joe Ferguson The position would offer event coordination, small business support, and bring in new businesses. This would increase foot traffic Downtown, as well as make the Downtown's identity more cohesive. This position has support from a larger group, and there are matching funds. This would be a complement to other capital projects. This position would be a resource for civic and arts groups, as well as an ambassador to the Downtown business owners.

Paula Caron asked under whose umbrella this position would be, and that it used to be under the

City. Joe responded that it would be ReImagine North of Main, in conjunction with TDI.

Paul Fontaine asked why this position was being considered again, as it had existed in the past without much success. Mike Hurley asked if this would be connected to Mary Jo Bohart's position, and how the two would work together. Tom noted that in the past, the position was more short-term, rather than a longer investment. CDBG and some private sector funding would get the position started, and after some time, it is typical for a coalition to fund this type of position.

The intention is for this to be an ongoing position, whereas the TDI Fellow is intended to be short-term and could not take on these responsibilities. And while there is some overlap with Mary Jo's position, she cannot fulfil the obligations of her role as well as coordinate the events, do marketing, or dedicate the time to the many diverse needs of the Downtown community. The private sector is asking for this role; Tom explains a complaint that the Community Development Department had received following an event, and how the Coordinator would be able to prevent that type of issue in the future.

3 PROPOSALS – \$80,000

REHABILITATION AND PRESERVATION

Code Enforcement – Fitchburg BOH

Year 45 Request: \$100,000 – Year 44 Award: \$100,000

Program funds will be used to pay 100% of one existing full-time BOH Inspector positions and 50% of one full-time Clerk position. Through the enforcement of the State's Sanitary and Building Codes, Fitchburg's housing stock will be greatly improved. To be eligible, this activity must be part of a comprehensive strategy to arrest deterioration, including housing rehab and demolition. It is estimated that 1,000 housing units (duplicated count) will be inspected in the CDBG strategy area.

Steve Curry, from the Board of Health, introduced himself and thanked the Board for their previous funding and support. Code Enforcement has four inspectors, all of whom spend time in the CDBG target area. CDBG funds support one of these positions. In the last year, the Department saw 3,000 violations and 2,500 corrections. Inspectors are committed to ridding blight or decay in the City. It's time consuming, but in the larger picture, these inspections can help prevent further blight and decay. There are over 40 receivership cases, and while many do not go into receivership, about half do. Landlords often cannot (or cannot afford) to restore properties to a non-blighted condition.

Paul Fontaine asked if the list for receivership is getting shorter. Steve said that the list is maintained at the courts, and that nearly 200 properties are vacant or foreclosed annually. Housing court has been asked to consider demolition for these properties, but it has not happened yet. Foreclosure is still an issue in the community.

Critical Home Repair – Habitat for Humanity

Year 45 Request: \$20,000 – Year 44 Award: N/A

Program funds will be used to fund up to 4 critical repairs in Fitchburg serving 10 households. Critical Home Repair is exterior or interior work to alleviate critical health, life, and safety issues or code violations for homeowners in need. Participants must own their own home and have a verifiable need

that falls within scope and capabilities. The home must be a primary principal residence, current on mortgage, property taxes and insurance. Repairs must be necessary to function in the home and homeowners must partner with Habitat. Particular focus will be in the North of Main neighborhood.

Carolyn Reed explained that Habitat for Humanity worked in 25 cities and towns in North Central Massachusetts, building 2 new houses per year. About ¼ of their work has been in Fitchburg, helping keep families in affordable homes.

Paula Caron asked for clarifications regarding number and types of repairs. Carolyn responded that would likely be four repairs – many of the repairs needed are roofs, which are expensive. Mike Hurley asked about energy saving projects, and Carolyn responded that Habitat utilized MassSave. Paula asked if the funding was for the projects, and Carolyn confirmed that the funding was used for materials. Paul Fontaine asked if the projects primarily utilized volunteer labor, while Peter Capodagli asked if these services were given, or if there was a loan involved. Carolyn explained that most of the work was completed by volunteers, and that while the services are provided at no charge, homeowners contributed through “sweat equity,” whether that was through labor, office work, or work at the ReStore. This agreement calls for 8 hours of service for every \$1,000 invested. Homeowners are also asked to complete a “pay it forward” agreement, but they are not obligated to do so.

Paul Beauchemin asked how people come to the program, and if the work is only on single-family homes, or if multi-families are involved, and if the program was offered City-wide. Carolyn responded that Liz Murphy is one of the referral sources to the program, and that multi-family properties are allowed, although they are almost always owner-occupied multi-family homes. The program is City-wide, but there is some focus on the North of Main neighborhood.

Liz Murphy explained that homeowner rehab, through the HOME program, require that the entire home be brought up to code, but that sometimes, a home simply needs a new roof, or other smaller project. Habitat for Humanity can perform these repairs faster and with less bureaucracy.

2 PROPOSALS – \$120,000

CLEARANCE ACTIVITIES

Demolition – Fitchburg Community Development Department

Year 45 Request: \$300,000 – Year 44 Award: \$264,668

Project funds will be used to remove abandoned structures which pose an imminent threat to public safety and which contribute to slums and blight. The entire City will be served but the principal benefit will accrue to the CDBG Strategy Area in which the proposed activities will take place. It is estimated that 7 buildings containing up to 21 units will be demolished. Consultants will be hired for specific expertise such as environmental assessment or engineering services.

Liz Murphy explained that in this application, the City would eliminate up to seven buildings that are blighted or a health and safety issue. There are a number of vacant properties and a great need for clearance. Community Development is currently working on the next round of site visits and setting priorities from the list of 40 properties current on the clearance list. Last year, 10 or 11 properties were demolished, with the City and CDBG splitting the cost. City funding would come from Free

Cash, so that seven planned could be more. The priority list will be ready when the funding is.

Tom Donnelly spoke in support of this application. Peter Capodagli noted that neighbors are starting to feel the positive effects of clearance, with many taking advantage of the side yard sales.

1 PROPOSAL – \$300,000

PLANNING AND ADMINISTRATION

Paul Fontaine opened the conversation by noting the 20% cap on Planning and Administration. He noted that in addition to the CDBG Administration application, there are two additional applications. He asked how the Board should even consider funding the other applications, considering that Community Development has typically noted that the Department needs as much of the 20% as possible to run the Department.

Liz Murphy [made some excellent points, which I could not keep up with, but can be summed up in part. Check for clarification] explained that program income generated from Revolving Loan revenue be appropriated for administrative use. Specifically, the Department can better cover its fringe expenses with this revenue.

Tom Skwierawski explained that in regards to the Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan application, the original plan was created in 1995 and was in need of updating. Submitting an application is more than asking for funding, but making a statement about this project being a priority for the Department. Paul asked if this project could be a part of CDBG administration, and be one of the duties of CDBG staff. Liz responded that the application is also in the interest of transparency, but that the project could be done in that way.

Paul noted that he holds nothing against NewVue, but in his experience he had never seen an application in this category other than CDBG Administration. Tom explained that NewVue's application is a question of eligibility – they had intended the application to be in a different category, but the nature of the work places it in the Administration and Planning category. Paul asked if DTA or MRPC funds might apply here, and Tom and Liz responded that they might.

Paul then invited Marc Dohan up to speak about his application. (see below)

CDBG Administration – Fitchburg Community Development Department **Year 45 Request: \$210,000 – Year 44 Award: \$179,000**

Project funds will provide for the necessary administration of CDBG programs and sub-recipient contracts in accordance with federal guidelines, including staffing, technical services, and planning activities. This also includes the cost of various activities such as the Consolidated Plan; Consolidated Annual Performance Report; Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing; and other strategic plans and services. These funds enable the City to apply for, receive, and administer additional federal and state grants.

Self-Evaluation & Transition Plan Update – Community Development Department
Year 45 Request: \$5,000 – Year 44 Award – N/A

Program funds will be used to update the City’s Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan, including a review of the current condition of facilities, programs, and services provided by the City and the development of a plan to address outstanding barrier issues. This will update the 1995 version of the Plan and will reflect the significant progress and change that has been made since the original plan was written.

Lowe Park Improvements – NewVue Communities
Year 45 Request: \$15,000 – Year 44 Award: N/A

Program funds will be used as match funding to conduct studies, and acquire estimates and plans, to improve Lowe Park. Funding will support the hiring of a landscape consultant, construction contractor, and other consultants. Some funding from 3rd party sources is already committed to this project.

Francisco Ramon joined Marc at the table and explained that this application would hire consultants to develop a proposal to submit funding requests so that additional funding for this project would be possible. Tom explained that Lowe Park has been identified for numerous reasons, but that the DPW has a backlog of work. [something about a design match]

Francisco said that this project was important to ReImagine North of Main and that in September 2018, a feasibility study was conducted. Some activity has already taken place, including focus groups. This project still needs the approval of the Parks Board, but addresses some public safety issues, including lighting, which would provide better visibility for the Police Department.

Paul Fontaine noted that the biggest issues is how to maintain all of the parks. Francisco explained that NewVue has committed to increasing civic participation in the area, and to leverage funds to improve the park.

Peter Capodagli asked if there could be shared access with the BF Brown site for parking, noting that is imperative to the work with the arts community that the BF Brown site be successful. Francisco explained that there are negotiations underway to address the issue, but that that is not the focus of the proposal. He said that Lowe Park would be a complement to the BF Brown Site. Paul Fontaine pointed out that with NewVue connected to both sites, they would be working toward both the purposes of BF Brown and Lowe Park.

Tom Donnelly reiterated the he does not want to see a current project be undercut by a proposed project.

Paula Caron asked if the project could qualify under Public Facilities, but Liz Murphy explained that design work that is not attached to construction does not qualify.

3 PROPOSALS – \$230,000

Paul Fontaine asked why Program Income was down in the proposed budget. Liz Murphy explained that Board of Health fines are down and there was a demolition project that was being repaid into Program Income that is no longer coming in. The Lead Program, which is close to wrapping up, meant fewer homeowner rehab projects. Homeowner Rehab will be picking up again.

Paul Fontaine noted that the estimates for Year 45 were much higher than the estimates for Year 44. Liz explained that the Year 44 estimates were particularly conservative, and that the government funding us at a much higher rate than was anticipated. While the funding hasn't been announced for Year 45, the estimates are based on level funding from Year 44.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:39 pm.