



Dorchester County Community Development Grant Program

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PLAN

Statement of Intent

This plan describes how Dorchester County SC will provide for participation by its citizens in the planning and implementation of Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) under Community Development Programs. The CDBG program provides US Department of Housing and Urban Development funds to rural counties and smaller jurisdictions on a competitive basis from the South Carolina Department of Commerce, Grants Administration. These funds must be used for projects, which benefit low and moderate-income persons in the elimination of slums and blight or meet an urgent community need. The program is also intended to assist smaller jurisdictions in undertaking community revitalization and economic development programs. The regulations give ultimate responsibility for the design and implementation of the program to the local elected officials and also require that citizens be given an opportunity to serve in an advisory role to these elected officials.

Scope of Citizen Participation

Citizens will be given the opportunity to participate in all phases of the CDBG program, including the development of the application, program implementation, assessment of performance and the design of the citizen participation plan. The general mechanisms for involvement will be public hearings, monthly planned neighborhood meetings through the life of an active project, articles in the newspaper, postings on the County website, groups of volunteers going door-to-door to conduct surveys, and individual citizen efforts in the form of comments, complaints or inquiries submitted directly to the Administrator's office.

Planning and Development

First, a community-wide Needs Assessment meeting will be held to give citizens a chance to discuss and prioritize the needs in the County. The County will present information concerning the CDBG program, including the amount of CDBG funds available, State funding guidelines and the range of activities, which may be undertaken, with such funds, particularly in relation to the identified community needs.

Once the indicated area(s) of need has been identified and matched to an appropriate grant, participation in the planning and development of the application will take the form of meetings, open to the entire community affected, which will be held during the preapplication and application development process.



A meeting will be held to review and solicit public comment on proposed activities of any grant application prior to submission of the application to the SC Department of Commerce, Grants Administration. County officials will also be available to advise citizens of the procedures for filing objections to the approval of the application with the South Carolina Department of Commerce, Grants Administration office, based on those grounds for objection acceptable to that office.

Program Implementation

Citizen participation in the program implementation phase will occur through individual community contacts, and any ad hoc neighborhood committees established. When appropriate, the County will provide information about project progress, proposed changes, etc., for publication on the County website and in a newspaper of general circulation. A public hearing will be held prior to making any substantial change in a CDBG funded project. All citizens, especially those who might be affected by the proposed changes, will be informed of the proposed changes and given an opportunity to comment.

Assessment of Performance

When all activities are completed, and prior to project closeout, the County will hold at least one public hearing to review program performance and accomplishments. Public comment will be sought in evaluating the overall program effectiveness.

Complaints and Grievances

As part of the process for evaluating performance, citizens will be invited to submit comments on all aspects of project performance throughout the program period. Complaints should be submitted in writing, to County Administrator, Dorchester County, 201 Johnston Street, St. George, SC 29477. A response will be made within 15 working days. If the response is unsatisfactory the complainant may write his/her appeal directly to County Council, which shall respond within 15 working days. Prior to any response to a written grievance which involves State law or policy, State CDBG program guidelines, or federal regulations governing the CDBG program, the County will provide the written grievance and its proposed response to the South Carolina Department of Commerce, Grants Administration, 1201 Main Street, Suite 1600, Columbia, SC 29201. However, the office will deny those appeals, which involve the consistent application of the community's local program policies. After the appeal process is exhausted, the complainant may seek relief in the appropriate court of law.

Technical Assistance

Technical assistance will be provided to individuals, citizen organizations and groups of low and moderate-income persons upon request to the County. Such assistance will support citizen effort to develop proposals, define policy and organize for the



implementation of projects. The County will, upon request, provide copies of program guidelines and other written information as relevant. Assistance will also be available in the form of group meetings with technical assistance staff from the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments or representatives from the South Carolina Department of Commerce's staff as pertains to the specific assistance required. The County will provide technical assistance only for requests concerning proposals whose activities are consistent with identified community development and housing needs and with State CDBG guidelines. The County will also require that there is available CDBG funding for the proposed activities, and that, in certain cases, the Council first must approve the request for technical assistance where provision of that assistance would require possible fees for consultants or major County staff time.

As part of on-going assistance to the Community, citizens will be provided with reasonable access to records concerning any project undertaken with CDBG funds. Records are generally kept at the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments offices, 5790 Casper Padgett Way, North Charleston, SC 29406. Requests for information must be made to the County in writing and a response will be made within 15 working days of receipt of the request. Confidential information normally protected under the State and Federal Freedom of Information Acts will not be made available for public review.

Public Notice

Notices for all public hearings will be published in the Eagle Record, the newspaper of general circulation in Dorchester County, SC. The notices will appear as a display ad and will be published at least seven (7) days prior to the date of the public hearing.

All public hearings will be held at a time deemed most convenient to the majority of the public, particularly those who may potentially be directly affected. All public hearings will be held in locations easily accessible to the handicapped.

Participation of Non-English Speaking Persons

According to the 2000 US Census Report, less than 6% of the residents speak English not well or not at all. Of the total population, non-English speaking groups were identified. It is assumed, therefore, that there will be no occasion to make special provisions for the participation of non-English speaking persons in the County's Citizen Participation Plan. However, should the situation arise where it is determined that 10% or more of the potential or actual beneficiaries of a CDBG project are determined to be non-English speaking, provision will be made at the appropriate public hearings for translation of comments and documents into the native language of the majority of the non-English speaking residents affected.