MEETING MINUTES
HOUSING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ACT COMMITTEE
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2013 7:00 P.M.
COUNCIL CHAMBERS - LORRAINE MORTON CIVIC CENTER
2100 RIDGE AVE., EVANSTON, ILLINOIS


Members Absent:  A. Hansen

Staff Present:  K. Brown, R. Dahal, B. Dorneker, S. Flax, S. Levine, M. Muenzer, J. Murphy, B. Newman, H. Pirooz

Presiding Member:  Ald. Rainey, Chair

CALL TO ORDER/DECLARATION OF QUORUM
There being a quorum, Chair Rainey called the meeting to order at 7:08 PM.

Chair Rainey welcomed everyone to the third proposal review meeting for the Community Development Block Grant distribution of funds for 2014 and explained that the Committee would be hearing City applications and that the Committee appreciates all they do and will be doing everything it can to fully fund each of their applications.

2014 CDBG PROGRAM—REVIEW OF APPLICATIONS

Certificate of Rehabilitation Program
Kevin Brown, Youth and Young Adult Program Manager, thanked the Committee for its support. He explained that the program supports a comprehensive youth program to serve and engage disengaged and disconnected youth with an emphasis on ages 14 – 26. Mr. Brown quoted statistics from a report called “After Prison: Road Blocks to Re-entry, A Report on State and Legal Barriers Facing People with Criminal Records.” “The Legal Action Center in New York City, a non-profit law and policy organization ranked the State of Illinois Number 1 out of 50 states in developing policies and laws to assist ex-offenders with re-entry.” He said this finding is encouraging in light of the following barriers faced by people with past criminal histories:

- 74% of employers say that nonviolent felony conviction influences the decision not to hire
- 65% of employers will not hire an applicant with even one criminal conviction of any kind
- 43% of landlords are inclined to reject applicants with even one criminal conviction.

Mr. Brown explained that the elected officials within Illinois are working to decrease the 47% rate for those without full time employment who have been incarcerated. The
yearly cost for those that re-offend due to the lack of employment and housing opportunities is $255 million. Mr. Brown said the Certificate of Rehabilitation and Sealing of Criminal Records Program is both good policy and good practice because it is consistent with the City’s work force development programs and it helps to re-integrate qualified individuals back into the community to make them eligible for on-the-job training programs that enable individuals to get jobs in specific industries.

At Ms. Sanke’s inquiry regarding the amount budgeted to childcare, Mr. Brown explained that the participants are required to travel to Circuit Court and other government locations and to meet with an attorney in attempt to seal the records or obtain the certificates, so they have attempted to provide wrap around services to support those needs within the program.

At Mr. Opdycke’s inquiry, Mr. Brown said that they do not have results because their program was started late because of the federal government sequester, which affected funding. However, Mr. Brown said he could provide research and support showing the effectiveness of this type of program, which he distributed.

Chair Rainey thanked him.

Handyman Program
Audrey Thompson, Long Term Care Ombudsman, thanked the Committee for their past support and consideration for their funding request of $35,000. She explained that the Handyman Program has served seniors for almost 20 years and its main objectives remain to provide minor home repairs and modifications to income-eligible home owners and renters 65 years of age and older and to ensure that seniors are able to safely remain in their homes. She explained that after seniors meet the eligibility criteria, staff schedules and completes eligible repairs. During the Handyman qualification procedure, senior services staff are also able to assess other needs that go deeper than simple housing repairs. This assessment continues when the handyman is in the home and can see a need for other services, and communicates that information back to the City of Evanston Senior Services staff, who conducts a triage to make sure their needs are met. Their goal is to ultimately protect and keep the City’s most vulnerable population safe. In the past year, the Handyman Program has had some challenges. It discontinued its contract with CEDA and experienced a delay in funding because of the late release of 2013 funds. As a result, they have a backlog of requests and are in the process of identifying a contractor to provide services. Because they have been unable to provide services in the past nine months, they will work to have a contractor by October 1st and then work to dissolve the backlog as well as future requests by the end of the year. During the previous year, however, the Handyman Program completed over 175 jobs. Ms. Thompson said the City has worked very hard to ensure that Evanston seniors have information about the program through the creation of the Evanston Benefit Card. There are currently 1,361 seniors eligible for the Handyman Program. In conclusion, she said the support they receive from the CDBG fund is invaluable and they request CDBG assistance so they may continue to enhance the quality of life for all Evanston senior residents.
At Chair Rainey's request, Ms. Thompson said in order to participate in the Handyman Program, a senior must bring proof of income in the form of their last income tax statement or a social security statement or check stub and proof of age (at least 65) to the Levy Center 8:30-5:00, Monday through Friday and they must meet the criteria to be eligible. They cannot apply online.

Ms. Sanke asked whether the anticipated increase of approximately 125% in those served in 2014 over 2013 is because of the backlog to which Ms. Thompson replied that they are encouraging more and more seniors to stay in their homes which the Handyman Program enables them to do, and more people are learning about the services.

At Chair Rainey's inquiry about the backlog, Ms. Thompson said that instead of telling callers they need to wait, they take their information and try to stay in contact with them. When she is walking into the Levy Center, she still has people saying, “Don't forget me.” She has a list of everyone who has called so she can contact them as soon as they have a new contractor.

Chair Rainey thanked her.

**Economic Development Fund**
Sarah Flax, Housing & Grants Administrator, standing in for Johanna Nyden, Manager of Economic Development, explained that because Economic Development projects do not come up once a year when allocations are done, money is put into a fund to be allocated throughout the year. Applications are now made through the Economic Development Committee. This change was implemented about a year ago because on larger projects where CDBG funds were layered with TIF and ED funds, applicants had to go through two committees before they went to Council and it was a cumbersome process for both the applicants and the Committees. Ms. Flax said no applications have been presented to the Economic Development Committee yet for 2013 but two are expected to be presented in the near future. Since the Economic Development Committee has been doing direct loans to businesses in NRSA’s to generate economic activity, their commitments have been much larger. In the past, they did only façade improvements of $15,000-$20,000, the largest being $40,000, but the two loans in 2013 were $130,000 and $75,000, layered with other City money in significant projects that have been catalysts in the City’s neighborhood revitalization strategy area. The Economic Development Committee is requesting $100,000 to be put into the fund for 2014 projects.

Chair Rainey thanked her. She agreed that this is the best of the different configurations of economic development funding they have tried.

**Penny Park Renovations**
Stefanie Levine, Assistant Superintendent of Parks, Recreation and Community Services, noted that Penny Park, located at Lake and Ashland, is a unique place in Evanston, and is a significant playground for the community. It was originally constructed in 1991 as part of a community build project with architect Robert Leathers, who customized designs and built parks entirely of wood. The community designed the
park with Leathers, raised the funds for the project and built the park together. She explained that since it has been about 22 years, the park equipment is getting worn down and the wood play structures and the park in general need to be rebuilt. They have begun the process and met with the community earlier this year. The community wants to re-create the same type of park. They are requesting $50,000 to complete the project, which could cost as much as $800,000.

At Chair Rainey’s request, Ms. Levine explained that they will have to contact Leathers Associates to discuss fees. Leathers is still in existence and have done over 3,000 playgrounds all over the world. They believe they will need to replace the playground components, rather than repair. Chair Rainey said she agreed that Leathers Associates should be the designers.

At Ald. Holmes inquiry, Ms. Levine said she does not believe that Penny Park was one of their first projects. Chair Rainey said the most exciting thing about the project was that the neighbors did a border of pennies around the entire area, each one touching the next.

Ald. Braithwaite said Leathers was not surprised to hear from our community and that several other communities are reaching back out to them. He said he has had several meetings with the community and Stefanie’s staff and there is a great deal of enthusiasm within the community, consisting of many families with young children. They have a mix of folks that have worked on the project and new families. He has heard many fascinating stories about the Penny Park.

Chair Rainey commended Ms. Levine on the job she does with the parks.

**Block Curb & Sidewalk and ADA Ramps**
Rajeev Dahal, of the Public Works Department, explained that this is their annual request for $150,000 to replace deteriorated sidewalks and curbs in the target areas to improve walkability. They will be surveying areas for next year to look into the feasibility of putting in sidewalks in areas where there are none. At Chair Rainey’s inquiry, Mr. Dahal said they need approximately 5.5’ from the property line to do the sidewalk, whether there are trees, etc., and there will be neighborhood coordination involved also.

Ald. Holmes said a courtesy walk was made in an area of her Ward where there was not room for a regular sidewalk. Chair Rainey said she knows people who don’t want sidewalks, just like people who don’t want their alley paved.

**Alley Paving Program**
Sat Nagar of Public Works explained that he is requesting funding of $300,000 for 2014 for the paving of 2 huge alleys: north of Greenwood, east of Dodge and north of Greenwood, east of Darrow. He distributed a map of the proposed alleys for paving. He explained that most of the easy alleys are already done so the ones they are going through now are the ones where they are having a hard time getting 50% of neighbors to sign the petition and agree to pay their share. He said when it is a large alley, it is difficult to get consensus, so CDBG funding is a great asset to the project.
SNAP Lighting
Mr. Dahal explained that Public Works is requesting $75,000 for the program that improves lighting to help prevent crime and improve safety in the target areas. In the last few years they have updated the lights at Darrow and Jackson. This year they are leveraging the other City projects to purchase about 114 tungsten lights and will upgrade the Talmadge lights in the target areas from 85 watts to 165 watts. They will be bringing the light purchase to City Council approval in October.

At Chair Rainey's inquiry, Mr. Dahal said that yes, various aldermen who have areas that qualify, should apply to receive the upgraded lighting.

Ald. Braithwaite asked why they cannot use the funds for some alleys, particularly those that have numerous complaints of high crime, to which Chair Rainey replied that there is an alley lighting program. Ald. Holmes said the alley lighting program is so reasonable at $11.00 a month, that she cannot support using this funding for alleys. Chair Rainey said the problem is that staff needs to focus making the public aware of the alley lighting program because people don't know about it. Ald. Holmes said 2-3 neighbors could get together and pay for their whole alley. Ald. Braithwaite said he pays for his, but in this request he is referring to a particularly dark alley with 2 foreclosed homes that is close to the high school. Ald. Holmes suggested that perhaps the high school will pay for it.

Chair Rainey asked that staff give some thought to sending an announcement in with the water bill explaining the alley lighting program.

Targeted Code Enforcement Program
Carl Caneva, Assistant Director of the Health Department, explained that the program has been in existence since the 1970’s and the 4 field inspectors, 1 customer service representative and 1 field staff supervisor, are all charged with spending 75% of their time in the CDBG area. They look for signs of blight such as dilapidated housing, structures in poor condition and make sure the interior of rental dwellings meet minimal life safety standards such as having carbon monoxide and smoke detectors. Mr. Caneva said it was a great opportunity for the Health Department to take charge of this program because it provides the opportunity for cross training, so when they go into rental housing, there is an eye not only to the structural deficiencies but to what health implications those could have, such as failing stairs relating to personal injury and water damage and mold related to asthma. In conclusion, Mr. Caneva said it is only with the CDBG funding that they can hope to reach their goals and the City’s main goal of making Evanston the most livable City.

Chair Rainey said this program played the most important role of anyone in making properties on the south end of town habitable and decent over the years. She said that was back in the day when they were taking every case to Circuit Court and it was very time consuming. She said it is a wonderful program and without this money, the City could not have focused so heavily on certain areas.

Chair Rainey thanked Mr. Caneva.
Housing Rehab Administration

Jeff Murphy, Manager of Building and Inspection Services, said he is requesting funds for the Housing Rehab Program, which is a huge asset to the City and was recognized by HUD during their monitoring a few years ago. Mr. Murphy said even though there is currently a mini economic boom and there is a great deal of permit revenue, there is also a huge increase in the amount of applications for assistance in many parts of the City. Currently they have 6 jobs under way and 5 applications pending, from sewer lateral collapses to leaking roofs and they are presented with a variety of issues on a daily basis. Mr. Murphy said they have become more efficient as they are asking for $167,038 this year. The assistant who works with their Rehab Specialist is billed 60% of her full time position to CDBG. The rest of her time is for business licensing and other tasks. The other improvement made this year is that they are using a new loan portfolio management tool called CDM, with which the Housing Rehab Specialist is going to write scopes of work using a mini ipad and the tool should make his work more efficient. Mr. Murphy said they hope to continue the program, which has been in existence for 20 plus years. The portfolio they are managing now is over $2,000,000.

At Chair Rainey’s request, for the public who might be listening, Mr. Murphy said the public who meet the income criteria which is 80% of the median income or below, (as defined by HUD), typically people are not between 60-80%; most are below 60%, and usually fall into the title transfer loan program, which is the biggest part of their portfolio. They have 66 title transfer loans currently, which means those clients are under 50% of the median income. The title transfer program helps people that cannot get help elsewhere. The typical participant is an owner-occupied, single family or 2 flat home owner. Most calls are urgent in nature and come through the 311 call center. The City is doing Spanish speaking outreach. Ms. Flax added that another thing the Housing Rehab Program helps with is when people are cited for code violations, they get referred to Housing Rehab, so they are not just told that they are not in compliance, but they are given the opportunity to fix up the property with these title transfer loans, which are critical, especially for seniors who are staying in their homes and need more than the Handyman Program can do, but cannot afford payments. Mr. Murphy added that the expertise of the Rehab Specialist is that he must be a social worker, a contractor, a project manager and a psychiatrist. He has a skill set that you just do not find out in the market; there is no equivalent in the private sector. Mr. Murphy said about 1/3 of their cases are with the issue of hoarding and people who have never dealt with or trust City contractors, so they are providing a valuable service. He said they get many compliments and they have always passed their HUD audits with flying colors.

Chair Rainey remembered, long ago, working with CEDA, that there was a fear that once the City got involved in title transfer, that the City would take your house. It was a very difficult hurdle to overcome. Mr. Murphy agreed and added that they have been fortunate because they have been dealing with high risk clients and have had very few of their clients go into foreclosure. He said that says something about the resiliency of their clients. They want to stay in their homes and that is their mission. Chair Rainey said they do a good job of evaluating clients and that the Rehab Specialist is fabulous.
CDBG Target Area Graffiti Removal Program
Mr. Murphy said the City is very proud of the Graffiti Removal Program and that the #1 priority with graffiti removal is speed. He said the City’s program is successful because we have an in-house person who is also an Evanston resident who has been doing his job for about 18 years, and knows the area and the paths taggers take and is extremely responsive to removal requests. He is also very good at locating Evanston-based private businesses for removing graffiti when he does not have the proper equipment, such as a power washer, to remove it and can generally get it removed within 24 hours. He said if it was not for Mr. Mims’ efforts, the City would no doubt be covered in graffiti. A few years ago, people were etching glass using shoe polish and it is impossible to remove the etching. Mr. Mims nipped that in the bud by staying on top of it from the beginning. They hope to continue this program and they are asking for $41,058, 50% of the actual cost of the program. He said he believes it is well worth the investment to keep the City looking the way it does.

Chair Rainey said if you see graffiti in town 2 or 3 days in a row, it is only because no one has called it in.

Ms. Sanke asked, regarding the sustainability of the program, since Mr. Mims is so great at what he does, whether any thought has been given to what would be done to replace him if he were to leave. Mr. Murphy said he had just been thinking about this. The City used to use the Cook County Graffiti Busters but they would take 2 weeks to remove graffiti and they are no longer in existence. Chair Rainey suggested he get an apprentice and then he can do his job twice as fast.

Ald. Braithwaite suggested that Mr. Brown look into assigning an apprentice to Mr. Mims. He commented on the alley behind Greenleaf and Dodge, which has been a graffiti spot for years, but over the last few years, has improved tremendously. He thanked Mr. Mims and staff that had been involved. He said he definitely is in support.

Mr. Opdycke asked about restitution to offenders by the Court, to which Mr. Murphy replied that it is a police matter, however he does know that Mr. Mims has gone to Circuit Court and there have been fines assessed to taggers’ parents. Mr. Murphy agreed to provide the Committee with information about the legal process of conviction, restitution, and consequences, etc., to taggers.

Chair Rainey thanked him.

Alley Special Assessment Assistance
Sarah Flax, Housing and Grants Administrator, explained that even when people vote to have their alleys paved through the 50/50 program, there are sometimes people living on those alleys who cannot afford their special assessment. Any income-qualified (80% or less of median income), owner-occupied housing owner, can apply to have their alley special assessment paid by the CDBG fund. This has been a useful tool to get neighbors to approve alley petitions and she has spent a great deal of time answering questions regarding the guidelines, etc. She said the people helped most often are seniors living on fixed incomes, so this program helps seniors to age in place.
This year they are requesting $5,000 for one tiny eligible alley, the \( \frac{1}{2} \) block between Sherman and Washington going north and south. Ms. Flax said she works closely with Public Works and keeps a list of people who have inquired about assistance. The alleys are paved about a year after the petitions are signed and a year after that the mailings go out, so peoples’ status can change. Many are seniors. The notices are in Spanish and English.

**CDBG Administration & Planning**

Ms. Flax explained that CDBG regulations allow up to 20% of the grant to be used for administration and planning and that she estimates staffing and other costs will be $300,000 but that amount cannot be awarded if it amounts to more than 20% of the City’s CDBG grant, so she requests that the Committee allocate 20% of the estimated CDBG grant. Ms. Flax noted that 2014 is when the next Consolidated Plan is due (every 5 years) and the timing matches the update of the City’s Comprehensive Plan. Ms. Flax explained that the Housing Planner position is significantly funded by CDBG and is integral to the development of the CAPER and Action Plan. The Neighborhood Planner historically has been partially funded by CDBG and handled environmental reviews which require a depth of knowledge.

At Chair Rainey’s inquiry, Ms. Flax said the recently opened NSP2 Specialist position is a less senior position, as many of the duties relate to compliance with housing occupancy requirements for up to 20 years on those properties.

Chair Rainey commended Ms. Flax saying the City could not be in better hands.

**Staff and Citizen Comment**

Ms. Flax announced that the funding allocation meeting will be held Tuesday, September 24th at 7:30 p.m. She explained that the Committee will be working with an estimated funding amount of $1,500,000, a 10% reduction from 2013 and she has received no indication of what 2014’s funding will be. She said the program income is $70,000, down significantly from last year, when the sale of 1817 Church Street occurred and there have not been many loan payments because they are mostly title transfers. Approximately $60,000 of unspent funds will be reallocated in 2014.

**Ms. Sanke moved to adjourn, seconded by Ald. Wilson.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Bobbie Newman