



CITY OF WATERTOWN CARES ACT AMENDMENT

PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE CITY OF WATERTOWN'S COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM YEAR 2020 ANNUAL ACTION PLAN

AMENDMENT– AUGUST 17, 2020

In response to the ongoing COVID-19 public health crisis, Congress recently enacted the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act). As part of the CARES Act, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) received funds to allocate to Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) entitlement communities to prevent, prepare and respond to the COVID-19 health crisis. HUD has allocated \$541,672 in Community Development Block Grant Coronavirus (CDBG-CV) funding to the City of Watertown.

In order for the City of Watertown to utilize these funds, a Substantial Amendment to the City's 2020 CDBG Annual Action Plan (AAP) is required. The City Council originally adopted the 2020 AAP on May 4, 2020, and the plan received HUD approval shortly thereafter. This document serves to describe the proposed amendment to the 2020 AAP and identify the proposed uses of the CDBG-CV funds.

Staff from the City's Planning and Community Development Department has discussed the special CDBG-CV allocation with the City's community partners over the course of the last two months and with the City Council at their meetings held on June 1, 2020 and July 6, 2020. During these discussions, the City Council indicated a strong desire to aid local food pantries with the funding and to allocate funding for local infrastructure projects as a way to stimulate local economic recovery. At the July 6, 2020 City Council meeting, the Council endorsed a preliminary list of CDBG-CV projects.

This amendment to the City 2020 AAP describes how the City will utilize CDBG-CV funds locally to address the urgent needs created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Community development programs and projects recommended for this funding include several infrastructure projects including the construction of new sidewalks, the replacement of non-compliant ADA ramps and the construction of playground enhancements. The amendment also includes substantial grants to four local food pantries as well as funding for the administration of the program. The proposed projects and associated budgets are as follows:

| Proposed CDBG-CV Project | Proposed Budget |
|--|---------------------|
| Grant Street Sidewalk Replacement | \$350,000 |
| Thompson Park ADA Ramp Construction | \$60,000 |
| N. Hamilton Street Playground Basketball Court | \$15,000 |
| Watertown Urban Mission Food Pantry | \$25,000 |
| Community Action Planning Council Food Pantry | \$25,000 |
| Watertown City School District Food For Families Program | \$25,000 |
| Salvation Army Food Pantry | \$25,000 |
| Program Administration | \$16,672 |
| | |
| Total | \$541,672.00 |

The projects proposed for implementation using the CARES Act funding are consistent with the City’s Consolidated Plan and will serve to implement two of the goals identified in the plan; Neighborhood Stabilization and Revitalization and Public Services Support. The following describes the various projects that are proposed.

Grant Street Sidewalk Replacement

This project involves constructing 5’ wide sidewalks on Grant Street between Main Street East and Henry Street. It would replace the existing sidewalks and would install new ones on a small portion of the east side of the 600 Block of Grant Street where there is currently a gap in the sidewalk network. Due to the nature of sidewalk construction work, the project will include the necessary removal of specific trees within the project area as well as tree replacement. The project is located in the City’s Northeast CDBG Target Area and is a main route from the surrounding neighborhood to Starbuck Elementary School. The project would be very impactful in this neighborhood as it would be paired with a separate curbing and street paving project already planned by the Department of Public Works. It would implement Safe Routes to School improvements and would also complement the Tilden Street sidewalk work planned for next spring as part of our 2020 CDBG Annual Action Plan. The project responds to the Coronavirus pandemic by providing economic opportunity for local and regional businesses through contracts with the City, the purchase of materials and supplies from area vendors and job opportunities for those employed by contractors and various vendors. The project also allows the City to continue to make important infrastructure improvements as many previously planned projects have been cancelled or put on hold as a result of reduced revenues that were caused by the shutdown that occurred in response to the pandemic.

Thompson Park ADA Ramp Replacement

This project involves constructing 10-to-12 ADA ramps in Thompson Park in the Tower Square area near the 10th Mountain Division Monument and near the playground, where either none currently exist or where the existing ramps do not comply with the current ADA PROWAG requirements. The project will ensure that the paths from the parking areas to the sidewalk network and playground are interconnected and accessible. It will help to meet an important non-housing community development need identified in the City's Consolidated Plan which is to ensure pedestrian safety by providing for the safe movement of the elderly and disabled. This project would help to enhance the work that the DPW has been completing in Thompson Park to address accessibility complaints that were received last year. Similar to the sidewalk project, this project responds to the Coronavirus pandemic by providing economic opportunity for local and regional businesses through contracts with the City, the purchase of materials and supplies from area vendors and job opportunities for those employed by contractors and various vendors. The project also allows the City to continue important infrastructure improvements that have been cancelled or put on hold as a result of reduced revenues that were caused by the shutdown that occurred in response to the pandemic.

North Hamilton Street Playground Basketball Court

This project involves installing a new asphalt pad for a basketball court and a new walkway at the North Hamilton Street Playground. The improvements will complement the recently completed playground replacement project that utilized 2015 CDBG funds. The new basketball court will replace an existing dirt court and will upgrade the pole and hoop. The project will also include an approximately sixty (60) feet of sidewalk to connect the main sidewalk to the playground area in order to make it more accessible. The project is located on the edge of the City's CDBG Near East Target Area; however, the service area for the playground encompasses a geographic area that has a Low to Moderate Income population greater than 51 percent, making it eligible for improvements. Although smaller in scale, this project is also similar to the sidewalk and ramp projects in that it will provide for economic opportunity for local businesses through contracts with the City and the purchase of materials and supplies from area vendors. The project also allows the City to implement infrastructure improvements that would otherwise not be possible because of the reduced local revenues that were caused by the shutdown related to the pandemic.

Food Pantries

With the CARES Act funding, the City of Watertown proposes to provide grants of \$25,000 each to four food pantries in Watertown, including the Watertown Urban Mission, the Community Action Planning Council, the Watertown City School District Food for Families (Backpack) Program and the Salvation Army. The grants to the food pantries would help cover the costs for an increased demand for food that the agencies have been seeing since the start of the pandemic. The Community Action Planning Council has seen a threefold increase in the demand for food pantry services since mid-March, which has put an unexpected strain on funding resources for providing food packages to those in need. Due to the increased demand, the agency anticipates a shortage of funds in the food pantry in the coming months. The Watertown Urban Mission has seen a similar demand and increase in their food pantry requests. The Urban Mission relies on sales from their thrift store for funding for the food pantry but the

thrift store has been closed due to the pandemic, which has impacted their ability to serve those in need. The four food pantry grants will respond immediately and directly to an urgent need that has been identified in the community that has been a direct result of the Coronavirus.

Program Administration

The proposed budget for the CDBG-CV funding includes a small amount for the administration of the grant. This allocation of approximately three percent of the grant total is less than the percentage that the City typically budgets for our annual allocation but it should be enough to adequately cover the Staff costs, based on the types of projects that are proposed.

Citizen Participation

The City's Community Development Block Grant Program has an adopted Citizen Participation Plan that outlines various steps that the City must take in order to engage the public in developing our Annual Action Plans and any amendments to them. Typically, an amendment to add the CDBG-CV funds to our 2020 Annual Action Plan would require a 30-day public comment period. However, HUD has waived this requirement provided that no less than five days are provided for public comments on the substantial amendment. The notice of the five-day public review and comment period for the AAP was published on July 25, 2020 in the *Watertown Daily Times*. The public review and written comment period was held from July 27, 2020 to July 31, 2020.

In addition to the public comment period, the City Council scheduled a public hearing on the proposed amendment for Monday, August 3, 2020 at 7:15 p.m. The public hearing was held both in-person in the City Council Chambers, Room 303, Watertown City Hall, 245 Washington St., Watertown, NY and virtually to allow for the widest range of public participation. The public was able to join the virtual meeting through the use of "GoToMeeting" and was required to register ahead of time using the following link: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/8425636077401820431> After a member of the public registered, a confirmation email was sent containing information regarding how to join the webinar.

Full copies of the PY 2020 Annual Action Plan Amendment were also available for public viewing on the City's website, www.watertown-ny.gov. Any interested person could also request that a free copy of the amendment be mailed to them by contacting the Planning Department at the address below.

The City also conducted outreach to several agencies and businesses listed in our Citizen Participation Plan by email notifying them of the proposed amendment and made the draft amendment available for review by appointment at City Hall in the Planning and Community Development Department, the City Clerk's Office and at the Roswell P. Flower Memorial Library and at the Watertown Housing Authority.

The City accepted comments on the PY 2020 Annual Action Plan Amendment through July 31, 2020. Interested parties could contact the Planning Department by phone with comments or may submit them in writing. The Planning Department can be reached by phone at

(315) 785-7741, by mail at 245 Washington St., Watertown, NY 13601 or by email at planning@watertown-ny.gov .

Public Comments

The City Council held a public hearing on August 3, 2020 at 7:15 pm. Three staff members from the Northern Regional Center for Independent Living spoke at the hearing. Comments on the plan included commending the efforts of the City to include ADA improvements to Grant Street and ADA ramps in and around Thompson Park. There was also a comment regarding the proposed improvements to the North Hamilton Street playground and recommending that ADA accommodations be added. As a result of the comment, the project description for the playground project was amended to add a propose walkway to make the playground structure more accessible. Another comment was received about the existing playground at Thompson Park and whether it would be possible to change the substrate to make it easier for all to access.