

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PLAN **(Revised April 2020)**

The purpose of Burlington County's Citizen Participation Plan is to create opportunities for and encourage citizen participation in the development of the County's Consolidated Housing and Community Development Plan, Annual Action Plans, amendments to the Plan, and performance reports. This Citizen Participation Plan describes the County's policies and procedures for public involvement in Burlington County's consolidated planning process.

CONSOLIDATED HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

For Burlington County and various entities within the County to be eligible to receive funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for Community Planning and Development Programs, the County must have an approved Consolidated Housing and Community Development Plan. The Consolidated Plan consists of three primary components: the Housing Plan, the Homeless Assistance Continuum of Care, and the Community and Economic Development Plan. Each component includes a needs assessment; an analysis, which identifies priorities; and a strategy, which establishes goals and objectives for addressing priority needs and time frames for achievements.

Annual Action Plans are then developed each year to identify the actions that will be taken, and projects that will be funded to meet the strategy's goals and objectives. The Annual Plan also serves as the County's application for grants offered by HUD, which generally include:

- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, which supports a wide range of housing, community improvements, and services.
- The HOME Investment Partnership (HOME) Program, which is a block grant designed to increase affordable housing.
- Any other emergency funding, such as CDBG-CV funding, to help communities respond to the impacts of COVID-19.

The overall goal of HUD's Community Planning and Development programs and the County's Consolidated Plan is to develop viable communities by providing decent housing and a suitable living environment and expand economic opportunities principally for low and moderate-income people.

RESPONSIBILITY OF COUNTY GOVERNMENT

When the County is awarded a Housing and Community Development grant, it enters into a contractual relationship with HUD to operate programs under specified HUD regulations. Certain County officials are then legally responsible for fulfilling specified duties and activities pertaining to the established contract or contracts.

It must be understood that the role of citizens is to advise and assist County officials in carrying out contractual obligations. Since no citizen would have a contractual responsibility with HUD, all citizens must serve as advisors and/or advocates only.

CONSOLIDATED PLAN DEVELOPMENT PARTICIPATION

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION OPPORTUNITIES

While the County is developing the Consolidated Plan, citizens are encouraged to give their views, opinions, and information on relevant subjects such as the housing and community development needs of low and moderate-income populations, the nature and location of needed community improvements and proposed activities to address these needs.

PUBLIC HEARING

During the development phase of the Consolidated Plan, Burlington County publicly announces and holds at least two public hearings. The following information is provided in the public notice and at the public hearing:

- The yearly amount of block grant funds that the County anticipates receiving from HUD.
- Activities that may be undertaken using these funds.
- The estimated amount of funding used to benefit the County's low and moderate-income populations.

MUNICIPAL PUBLIC HEARINGS

Any municipality intending to apply for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program must advertise and conduct a public hearing on their proposed CDBG project. Following the Sunshine Law, a notice of the hearing is published at least ten days before the hearing and a description of the proposal is made available for public review during this period and at the hearing.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE WORKSHOP

Community Development Program technical assistance is given to provide guidance to applicants in their development of funding proposals. A Technical Assistance Workshop is held each year, one month before the submission date for CDBG applications from participating Burlington County municipalities. Workshops are announced by public notice, on the County website, and notices are also mailed to interested parties. The Community Development Program Office maintains a mailing list for such notices, and interested parties may request to be placed on the mailing list to receive notices and applications packages.

INDIVIDUAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The staff of the Community Development Program is available to meet individually with citizens or citizen groups who wish to meet and express their opinions and suggestions personally and less formally than in a public meeting. These meetings are scheduled by a citizen or representative of a citizen group.

Since applications for HOME Investment Partnership Program are accepted during the bid process and technical assistance for the development of HOME applications is conducted through appointments with HOME Program staff. Affordable housing developers, sponsors, or owners are encouraged to work closely with citizens and citizens groups within their housing development areas while developing proposed projects.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The purpose of Burlington County's Community Development Advisory Committee is to study the County's community development needs, prioritize funding, and recommend activities to be funded. The advisory committee membership is structured to represent a broad base of expertise and to represent local community interests comprehensively. Members are comprised of the mayors of each municipality in the County plus twenty (20) citizens that are appointed by the Board of Chosen Freeholders.

Two Community Development Advisory Committee meetings are held during the development phase of the Consolidated Plan and each Annual Action Plan. These meetings are open to the public.

Meeting Purposes

The initial Community Development Advisory Committee meeting is for the formal annual reorganization of the Community Development General Advisory Committee. It includes the election of officers and the Executive Committee.

The second Community Development Advisory Committee meeting is to develop the committees' recommendations for the Community Development Program. At this meeting, the Community Development Advisory Committee considers the draft plan, while the Executive Committee creates recommendations for proposed activities and recommendations for the use of CDBG and HOME funds. Following the committees' business, citizens may comment on the proposed program. The committees' recommendations are included in the draft Consolidated Plan.

BURLINGTON COUNTY CONTINUUM OF CARE (CoC)

The CoC is the lead organization for homeless assistance planning and advocacy in the County. The CoC Committee plans the County's Homeless Assistance Continuum of Care System. It makes recommendations for the use of funds to support that system.

The CoC Committee is comprised of social service providers from both public and private non-profit agencies that provide services and housing opportunities for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness. Representatives include state and county Human Services Departments, the County Board of Social Services, social service providers, operators of emergency shelters, neighborhood groups, housing developers, realtors, local businesses, service users, and at least one individual who is formally homeless. CoC Committee meetings are open to the public and are held each month.

OTHER PUBLIC VENUES

To facilitate participation in the plan development by community organizations, service agencies, citizens groups, and the like, the County Community Development Program staff maintain representation on the following committees: Human Services Advisory Council, Office on Aging Advisory Council and Burlington County Coalition for the Homeless and Coordinated Assessment. These committees meet on a regular basis, usually monthly, and offer forums for the exchange of information. Committee meetings are generally open to the public.

The Community Development Office seeks out and consults with groups that represent special needs populations (senior citizens, the disabled, veterans, etc.), residents of low-income neighborhoods, minorities, residents of public housing, and residents of assisted housing. Such groups are encouraged to contact the Community Development Program Office to arrange meetings at any time.

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Surveys may be used to gather information and opinions from citizens that cannot attend meetings or to provide supplementary data.

PERFORMANCE REPORTS AND PUBLIC HEARINGS

A Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER) is completed annually at the end of each program year. The CAPER is subject to a public review period of 15 days on the County Community Development Program website. Notification of the availability of the CAPER for public review and comment is published in the *Burlington County Times*. The notice informs interested citizens where they may obtain a copy for review and when and how to submit comments.

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM PUBLIC HEARINGS

All public hearings are open to all citizens of Burlington County and are held in locations that are handicapped accessible as well as accessible by way of public transportation.

A minimum of 10 days advance public notice is given before each public hearing. Public notices will include the location, time, and a brief description of the hearing's purpose and agenda.

Public hearings are announced by:

- Placing of display notices in the Forward Section of the county newspaper, the *Burlington County Times*.
- Placement of notice on the County's Community Development Program website.
- Accommodations are made to assist persons with disabilities and language barriers to participating in public hearings fully. This includes:
 - Groups of non-English speaking persons that need translations during meetings;
 - Persons that speak sign language and need a sign language interpreter during meetings;
 - Persons that are blind or lacking in reading skills and need a reader for public documents.

In accordance with a series of waivers issued by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development on March 31, 2020, it may be necessary to expedite actions to respond to COVID-19 or other infectious diseases; the County may reduce the notice of public hearings to five (5) days. Furthermore, in the event a state of emergency is issued limiting public gatherings, the County may use virtual public hearings to provide residents with an opportunity to provide input.

Individuals requiring assistance due to handicap, disability or language barrier in order to attend hearings or meetings may contact the Equal Opportunity Officer of the Community Development Program so that accommodations can be made. The Community Development Program's phone number is 609-265-5072. Requests for assistance must be made at least four (4) days in advance of the date the assistance is needed.

PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT OF DRAFT PLAN

A draft of each Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plan is made available for public review prior to the Plan being adopted by the County on the Community Development Program's website. A 30-day comment period is provided to allow any county resident or interested organization the opportunity to

review and comment on the contents of the draft Plan. The Plan will also be made available at the Burlington County Library in Westampton, the Freeholders Office in Mount Holly, and the Bridge Commission in Mount Laurel.

Notice of Availability for the 30-day public review and comment period is published in the *Burlington County Times*. Included in this notice are a summary of the Plan with a description of its contents and purpose, a URL link to where the Plan can be found, and instructions on how to submit comments. Key information such as the time, date, and location for public hearings is also included in the Notice of Availability.

Public Hearings

The Community Development planning process provides for two public hearings in order to give citizens an ample opportunity to comment on the draft plan.

One public hearing is held during the development of the Plan to solicit input and comments on community needs. The second public hearing is held during the 30-day comment period of the draft Plan's publication on the County website.

Amendments to the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan

- Amendments to the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan are made through a Substantial Amendment process. An amendment is considered "substantial" when:
 - An addition of an activity not previously described in the Plan.
 - Deletion of an activity previously described in the Plan.
 - A change in an approved activity affecting the purpose, scope, location or beneficiaries defined as follows:
 - Purpose. Any change that would result in the activity not meeting its original purpose.
 - Scope. An increase or decrease in the original budget activity by more than \$50,000.
 - Location. A change in the location in which the activity will be concentrated and/or the service area of the activity.
 - Beneficiaries. Any change in the populations to be served by an area benefit activity as represented by any change in the census tract/block group or groups that comprise the service area; or a change in the percentage of low and moderate income persons benefitting from the activity, or a change in the limited clientele group to be served by the activity.

Municipalities that request a substantial change to an activity they intend to carry out must first advertise and hold a public hearing to give their residents an opportunity to review and comment on the proposed change. The municipality's public hearing shall be announced by publication of a 5-day advanced notice in the local newspaper. A description of the change is to be available for review during the 5-day period and at the public hearing.

The County publishes a summary of the amendment in the *Burlington County Times* announcing a 30-day public review and comment period. Included in the notice is information on when and how citizens can make comments and that the complete amendment is available for review at the Community Development Program Office.

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In accordance with a series of waivers issued by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development on March 31, 2020, it may be necessary to expedite actions to respond to COVID-19 or other infectious diseases, the County may reduce the public comment period to no less than five (5) days.

Consideration of Public Comments About Plans and Plan Revisions

Public comments are given consideration before the Consolidated Plan, or Amendments to the Plan are finalized. Comments that are received in writing during comment periods or are expressed at public hearings are summarized and attached to the final Plan or amendment. The summary also provides reasons for comments or views that are not accepted.

RECORDS AVAILABLE TO PUBLIC AND COMPLAINTS

Documents and Records Available to the Public

The Consolidated Housing and Community Development Plan, Annual Action Plans, Plan Amendments and Performance Reports are available on the Community Development Program Office website for public review.

Copies of the Consolidated Plan and Performance Report are available at rates established by the Public Right to Know Law. Free copies are made available to groups that represent low and moderate-income residents, low and moderate-income areas, and groups that represent special needs populations.

Residents with issues accessing documents should contact Jennifer Hiros, Division Head at Burlington County Community Development Office, Human Services Facility, 795 Woodlane Road, Westampton, NJ 08060 (jhiros@co.burlington.nj.us).

Complaints

Should any citizen or representative of a citizen group have any complaints concerning the Consolidated Plan, Annual Plans, Amendments, or Performance Reports, the complaint must be made in writing and submitted to the Community Development Program Division Head at the address shown above. Within 15 days of receiving the written complaint, the Division Head shall respond in writing to acknowledge and address the complaint.

ANTI-DISPLACEMENT AND RELOCATION ASSISTANCE PLAN

Consistent with the goals and objectives of activities assisted under Section 104(d) of the Housing and Community Development Act, Burlington County will take the following steps to minimize the displacement of persons from their homes: the County will not use funds provided under the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, as amended, to assist in undertaking activities which will result in the demolition or conversion to other use of occupied or vacant-occupiable low and/or moderate-income dwellings.

Should demolition or conversion to other use occur or become necessary as a result of unforeseen circumstances, the County will replace all occupied and vacant-occupiable low and/or moderate-income dwelling units demolished or converted to a use other than as low and/or moderate-income housing as a direct result of activities assisted with funds provided under the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, as amended, as described in 24 CFR 570.606(b)(1).

Requirements Before Demolition/Conversion

All replacement housing will be provided within three years or commencement of the demolition or rehabilitation relating to conversion. Before obligating or expending funds that will directly result in such demolition or conversion, the County will make public and submit to HUD the following information:

- A description of the proposed assisted activity.
- The general location on a map and approximate number of dwelling units by size (number of bedrooms) that will be demolished or converted to a use other than low and/or moderate-income dwelling units as a direct result of the assisted activity.
- A time schedule for the commencement of the demolition or conversion.
- The general location on a map and approximate number of dwelling units by size (number of bedrooms) that will be provided as replacement dwelling units.
- The source of funding and a time schedule for the provision of replacement dwelling units.
- The basis for concluding that each replacement dwelling unit will remain a low and/or moderate-income dwelling unit for at least ten years from the date of initial occupancy.

The County will not use funds provided under the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, as amended, to assist or undertake new activities other than code enforcement, which are anticipated to cause permanent displacement.

Relocation Assistance

Should displacement become necessary as a result of unforeseen circumstances that may occur, the County will provide relocation assistance, as described in 24 CFR Part 570.606(b)(2), to each low and/or moderate-income household displaced by the demolition of housing or by the conversion of a low and/or moderate-income dwelling to another use as a direct result of assisted activities.