

## **CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PLAN FORT BEND COUNTY, TEXAS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This Citizen Participation Plan describes the process whereby citizens, organizations, local governments and agencies may take part in the development of the Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plans, Substantial Amendments to plans, the Consolidated Annual Performance Report (CAPER), and the submission of loan guarantee fund applications. This Citizen Participation Plan is required in the regulations for the Consolidated Plan (CFR 91.105). The plan provides for:

- giving citizens timely notice of local meetings and reasonable and timely access to local meetings, information, and records;
- giving citizens access to technical assistance in developing proposals;
- holding the minimum number of public meetings and/or hearings;
- meeting the needs of non-English speaking residents;
- providing affected citizens with reasonable advance notice of, and opportunity to comment on, proposed activities not previously included in an application and activities which are proposed to be deleted or substantially changed in terms of purpose, scope, location, or beneficiaries;
- responding to citizen complaints and grievances in a timely manner; and
- encouraging citizen participation, particularly by low- and moderate-income persons who reside in slum or blighted areas, and other areas in which loan guarantee funds are to be used.

### **1. Encouragement of Citizen Participation**

Fort Bend County encourages the participation of local and regional institutions, the Continuum of Care and other organizations in developing and implementing the consolidated plan. Fort Bend County will explore alternative public involvement techniques and quantitative ways to measure efforts that encourage citizen participation in a shared vision for change in communities and neighborhoods, and the review of program performance.

### **2. Timely Notice and Access to Meetings, Information, and Records.**

The Fort Bend County Community Development Department will give citizens timely notice of the opportunity to make written or verbal comments pertaining to the use of CDBG, ESG, and HOME funds or loan guarantee funds. Prior to the preparation, approval and submission of the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Department will publish notices in one or more local newspapers of general circulation and will post notices on the County's website: <http://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/> In addition, the Department will maintain a contact list of interested citizens, organizations, and agencies and identify and notify potential and actual beneficiaries (e.g., cooperative cities, non-profit organizations, public agencies) of the opportunity to make recommendations pertaining to the use of funds. The contact list will be used to notify interested persons of the Department's intent to hold public meetings to allow citizens to identify community needs and make recommendations for how funds may be used.

Citizens will be given an opportunity to make verbal and written recommendations pertaining to the use of funds. Draft copies of the Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plans and CAPERs, loan

guarantees will be available for review at the office of the Fort Bend County Community Development Department and copies will be available for anyone requesting a copy. An electronic copy will be made available for anyone requesting an electronic copy of the Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plan, or CAPER. Citizens and other affected parties will be provided an opportunity to examine the contents of the plan and report and submit comments and recommendations (1) at public meetings held for that purpose, (2) by mail, (3) by email, and (4) by delivery to the office of the Fort Bend County Community Development Department. Citizens and other affected parties will be encouraged to submit written recommendations to the Department for documentation and evaluation purposes. Comments and recommendations received at the public meetings will be reviewed by the Department and will be taken into consideration when the Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plan, CAPER, or loan guarantee applications are prepared.

Citizens will be given at least 30 days to comment on the draft Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan before the final plans are completed. Citizens will be provided at least 15 days to submit comments regarding the CAPER before the final report is completed. A summary of the proposed plans and/or reports will be published as a public notice in one or more local newspapers. In addition, a summary of the proposed plans and/or reports may be posted on the County's website. A summary of any comments received will be attached to the final plans. The final Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plan will be reviewed by Fort Bend County Commissioners Court. Upon approval, the final Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plan and/or loan guarantee applications will be available to the public upon request.

The Fort Bend County Community Development Department will give citizens timely access to local meetings. Public meetings and/or public hearings will be held at times and places that are convenient for potential and actual beneficiaries. Meetings and hearings will be held in facilities that are accessible to the disabled. The Department will make a reasonable effort to accommodate disabled persons and when possible, provide auxiliary aids upon request. Spanish language translators will be available for persons with limited English Proficiency. Persons requiring other language translators may request translation services from the Department (See Section 5).

The Fort Bend County Community Development Department will provide reasonable and timely access to information and records pertaining to projected and actual use of funds and to information, and records relating to the County's projected and actual use of loan guarantee funds (See Section 7). The public may be required to provide reasonable notice and to pay for the cost of reproduction of multiple copies of written materials.

### **3. Technical Assistance.**

Upon request, the Fort Bend County Community Development Department will provide technical assistance to groups representing of persons of low- and moderate-income that request such assistance in developing proposals before the release of the County's annual request for proposals (RFPs). The Fort Bend County Community Development Department will provide this assistance at a level and type commensurate with its staff capabilities and resources. The provision of technical assistance does not include the provision of funds to such groups.

In addition, the Fort Bend County Community Development Department will provide information to groups regarding technical assistance being provided or sponsored by HUD or other organizations.

#### **4. Minimum Number of Public Hearings.**

The Fort Bend County Community Development Department will hold a minimum of one public hearing during the development of the Consolidated Plan. At least one other public hearing will be held during the program year to obtain citizens' views and to respond to proposals and questions. In addition, public meetings will be held during the Consolidated Plan, Annual Plan and CAPER processes, each at different stages of its program, for the purpose of obtaining the views of citizens and formulating or responding to proposals and questions. All together, these meetings and/or hearings will address community development and housing needs, development of the Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plan, loan guarantee applications, and review of program performance in the CAPER. At least one of these meetings and/or hearings will be held before submission of the Consolidated Plan and/or Annual Action Plan to obtain the view of citizens on community development and housing needs and program funding recommendations. Reasonable notice of meetings and/or hearings will be provided and the meetings and/or hearings will be held at times and locations convenient to potential or actual beneficiaries, with accommodations for the disabled.

#### **5. Needs of Non-English Speaking Residents.**

In the case of public meetings and/or hearings where a significant number of non-English speaking residents can reasonably be expected to attend and participate, Spanish speaking FBC Community Development Department staff will be available to provide translation assistance and public information to persons with Limited English Proficiency. Persons requiring other language translators must contact the department at least 48 hours prior to the meeting at (281) 341-4410 to request translation services for the public meeting and/or hearing.

#### **6. Reasonable Advance Notice.**

The Fort Bend County Community Development Department will provide affected citizens with reasonable advance notice of, and opportunity to comment on, proposed activities not previously included in an application and activities which are proposed to be deleted or substantially changed in terms of purpose, scope, locations, or beneficiaries. The criteria that the Fort Bend County Community Development Department will use to determine what constitutes a substantial change for this purpose is described below.

A Consolidated Plan is submitted to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) prior to receiving annual entitlement funds. Amendments to the Consolidated Plan are required whenever it is decided:

- (a) not to carry out an activity described in the Consolidated Plan;
- (b) to carry out an activity not previously described in the Consolidated Plan; or

- (c) to substantially change the purpose, scope, location, or beneficiaries of an activity. The definitions and/or criteria for what constitutes a substantial change for the purpose of amending the Consolidated Plan are as follows:
  - (1) Purpose: The purpose is substantially changed if the overall purpose for which a project is funded changes. Changing a specific objective without changing the overall purpose of the project will not be considered a substantial change.
  - (2) Scope: The scope is substantially changed if the original estimated cost of the project is increased by twenty percent or more.
  - (3) Location: The location is substantially changed if the service area of a project changes from the original service area.
  - (4) Beneficiaries: The beneficiaries are substantially changed if there is a change in type or the number is increased by twenty percent or more.

Citizens will be provided at least 30 days to comment on the substantial amendment to the Consolidated Plan before the amendment is implemented unless otherwise allowed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

## **7. Loan Guarantees**

The CDBG Program Loan Guarantees regulation at 24 CFR 570.704 (a)(2) Citizen Participation plan requires that the citizen plan required for the Consolidated Plan be modified to include loan guarantee funds. The regulation states that:

The plan must be completed and available before the application is submitted to HUD. The plan may be the citizen plan required for the consolidated plan, modified to include loan guarantee funds. The public entity is not required to hold a separate public hearing for its consolidated plan and for the loan guarantee funds to obtain citizens' views on community development and housing needs. The plan must set forth the public entity's policies and procedures for:

- (i) Giving citizens timely notice of local meetings and reasonable and timely access to local meetings, information, and records relating to the public entity's proposed and actual use of loan guarantee funds, including, but not limited to:
  - (A) The amount of loan guarantee funds expected to be made available for the coming year, including program income anticipated to be generated by the activities carried out with loan guarantee funds;
  - (B) The range of activities that may be undertaken with loan guarantee funds;
  - (C) The estimated amount of loan guarantee funds (including program income derived therefrom) proposed to be used for activities that will benefit low and moderate income persons;
  - (D) The proposed activities likely to result in displacement and the public entity's plans, consistent with the policies developed under §570.606 for minimizing displacement of persons as a result of its proposed activities.
- (ii) Providing technical assistance to groups representative of persons of low and moderate income that request assistance in developing proposals. The level and type of assistance to be provided is at the discretion of the public entity. Such assistance need not include the provision of funds to such groups.

- (iii) Holding a minimum of two public hearings, each at a different stage of the public entity's program, for the purpose of obtaining the views of citizens and formulating or responding to proposals and questions. Together the hearings must address community development and housing needs, development of proposed activities and review of program performance. At least one of these hearings must be held before submission of the application to obtain the views of citizens on community development and housing needs. Reasonable notice of the hearing must be provided and the hearing must be held at times and locations convenient to potential or actual beneficiaries, with accommodation for the handicapped. The public entity must specify in its plan how it will meet the requirement for a hearing at times and locations convenient to potential or actual beneficiaries.
- (iv) Meeting the needs of non-English speaking residents in the case of public hearings where a significant number of non-English speaking residents can reasonably be expected to participate.
- (v) Providing affected citizens with reasonable advance notice of, and opportunity to comment on, proposed activities not previously included in an application and activities which are proposed to be deleted or substantially changed in terms of purpose, scope, location, or beneficiaries. The criteria the public entity will use to determine what constitutes a substantial change for this purpose must be described in the citizen participation plan.

Fort Bend County's Public Participation Plan requirements for loan guarantees will follow the same public participation process for the Consolidated Plan with the following additions:

If a proposed loan guarantee project is located within an incorporated area in the County's service area, the local government of the incorporated area will conduct public meetings and/or hearings regarding the proposed project before the County holds the County's public hearing on the proposed project.

If a proposed loan guarantee project is located in the unincorporated area in the County's service area, the County may hold a public meeting at a suitable meeting place near the site of the proposed project before the County holds the County's public hearing on the proposed project.

Public Comment: The County will publish community-wide its proposed application so that the affected citizens will have the opportunity to examine the application's contents and to provide comments on the proposed application. The proposed application will be available on the County website during at least a thirty (30) day comment period. The County will schedule any public meetings and/or hearings within the comment period. The County will consider any comments and views received and, if the County deems appropriate, modify the proposed application. Upon completion, the County will make the final proposed application available to the public.

## **8. Responses to Grievances and Complaints.**

The Fort Bend County Community Development Department will make every effort to respond to written complaints and grievances within fifteen (15) working days of the receipt of the written complaint where practicable.

## **9. Citizen Participation.**

The Fort Bend County Community Development Department will make every effort to encourage citizen participation, particularly by low- and moderate-income persons who reside in slum and blighted areas, and other areas in which funds are proposed to be used.

## **10. Disasters and Emergencies.**

In the event of a national disaster or emergency, HUD may allow Fort Bend County to expedite the citizen participation process in order to quicken the County's ability to respond to the disaster or emergency. On March 31, 2020, HUD issued a memorandum explaining the availability of waivers of certain regulatory requirements associated with several Community and Planning Development (CPD) grant programs to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to facilitate assistance to eligible communities and households economically impacted by COVID-19.

Given the need to expedite actions to respond to COVID-19, HUD waives 24 CFR 91.105(c)(2) and (k), 91.115(c)(2) and (i) as specified below, in order to balance the need to respond quickly to the growing spread and effects of COVID-19 with the statutory requirements to provide reasonable notice and opportunity for citizens to comment on substantial amendments concerning the purposed uses of CDBG, HOME, and ESG funds.

The 30-day minimum for the required public comment period is waived for substantial amendments, provided that no less than 5 days are provided for public comments on each substantial amendment. The waiver is available through the end of the County's 2020 program year (August 31, 2021).

HUD also recognizes the efforts to contain COVID-19 require limiting public gatherings, such as those often used to obtain citizen participation, and that there is a need to respond quickly to the growing spread and effects of COVID-19. Therefore, HUD waives 24 CFR 91.105(c)(2) and (k), 24 CFR 91.115(c)(2) and (i) and 24 CFR 91.401 as specified below to allow these grantees to determine what constitutes reasonable notice and opportunity to comment given their circumstances. This authority is in effect through the end of the County's 2020 program year (August 31, 2021). Fort Bend County defines public hearing also to include virtual hearings and public meeting also to include virtual meetings for purposes of this Citizen Participation Plan as well as meeting the requirements for public hearings under the CDBG regulations (24 CFR Part 91.105(e)(1)).