

**Minutes**  
**Of the Public Hearing**  
CDBG Advisory Committee  
Thursday February 2, 2023, 7 PM  
Via Zoom

**Members:** Becky Michaels (Chair), Gregory Bascomb, Nat Larson, Rika Clement, Suzanne Schilling, Lucas Hanscom

**Staff:** Nate Malloy (Planner)

**Guests:** 16177082799, Alexis Breitenzeicher (Valley CDC), Eyad Salha (Valley CDC), Francine Rodriguez (Family Outreach), Hayley Bolton (Senior Center), Jennifer Moyston, Judith Roberts (The Literacy Project), Laurie Millman (Center for New Americans), Lev BenEzra (Survival Center), Rep. Mindy Domb, Susan Nicaastro (Big Brothers Big Sisters), Tim McCarthy (Craig's Doors), Amherst Community Connections, Lydia Vernon-Jones, Sarah Zimm (Craig's Doors), Lauren Mills

Meeting called to order at 7:02pm

Chair Becky Michaels read the preamble and explained the purpose of the hearing: to receive comments and feedback on the recommended activities.

**PUBLIC HEARING**

Laurie Millman, Center for New Americans: Thanked the committee for their thoughtful process that honored the mission and intention of the funding by supporting programs that meet community needs and priorities. She said that a modest investment of CDBG funds helps leverage the program and will have a positive impact.

Judith Roberts, The Literacy Project: Acknowledged the good work of the committee and although not recommended, was appreciative of the process and that The Literacy Project received 2021 CDBG grant that is helping expand programming.

Susan Nicaastro, Big Brothers Big Sisters: Thanked the committee for recommending the activity as the funding makes a critical difference in the program by adding much need mentors.

Lev Ben-Ezra, Amherst Survival Center: Appreciated the committee's deliberations and careful review of proposals. Provided an update that the Food Pantry is seeing a staggering rise in need, especially in the last few months. Only seven months into the 2021 CDBG and the Food Pantry has served 1,986 Amherst residents, representing 98% of the goal for an entire year. Even with a very efficient staff and program, it is a difficult time, and glad that the committee recommended level funding from the previous grant year. CDBG funds allows the Food Pantry to meet the need of Amherst residents by providing healthy food options. She recalled how Pantry guests share their stories, often mentioning that without this food, they would not

survive. The current CDBG allocation breaks down to \$25 per Amherst resident served for a year—two weeks of groceries every month. The Food Pantry is expecting more residents given the trends in need and certain benefits ending this year.

Lauren Mills, Resident: Said that she would like CDBG funds to be used to develop a cultural youth empowerment center, building on the work of the newly formed CRESS Department. The Center could serve low- and moderate-income residents. Additionally, the Town needs more housing and an assessment of the needs of those experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity to learn how to help them; need dignity-based services to meet people where they are in terms of housing or food insecurity.

Tim McCarthy, Craig's Doors: The Shelter has expanded capacity by 15 beds to help people in from the recent cold, as well as into emergency stays at a local hotel. Shelter is looking to provide more robust case management with staff that are trained in trauma, informed care, harm reduction measures, de-escalation and more humanistic services. Thanked the committee for their thoughtful process and recommending Craig's Doors for funding, as it will be help support a new position that will focus on finding housing for shelter guests. Tim mentioned that the first 'Winter Walk' to end homelessness was taking place on Sunday, and that it has been a success in Eastern MA.

Francine Rodriguez, Family Outreach of Amherst (FOA): Thank the committee for prioritizing housing as it is a critical need. FOA collaborates with the other service agencies, working to keep residents housed and fed. FOA has seen a growth in their support services, with landlords reaching out directly asking if they could work with a tenant to keep them housed. Unfortunately, the housing market in Amherst is getting unreasonably expensive, beyond the payment standards for a voucher holder, forcing many renters to leave town.

After the public comments the committee discussed the recommendations and agreed by consensus that recommended activities and funding levels would remain the same. The committee also agreed that the Target Areas and Community Development Strategy did not need to be updated or changed. Staff said that these would be confirmed with the Town Manager in preparation for the application to DHCD.

Staff noted that the committee will need to hold a public hearing in April to review current activities and could also schedule site visits to the social service organizations in the spring. The Committee said that this would be a good time to review outreach strategies, including the effectiveness of the online survey.

The public hearing and public meeting were closed at 8:50 PM