

## **CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PLAN**

This plan describes how Ashe County will involve citizens in the planning, implementation and assessment of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. The funds must be used for projects which benefit low and moderate-income persons and aids in the elimination and prevention of slums and blight. The program is intended to assist governments in understanding neighborhood improvement programs. The regulations give ultimate responsibility for the design and implementation of the program to local elected officials and require that citizens be given an opportunity to serve in a key advisory role to these elected officials.

### **SCOPE OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION**

Citizens will be involved in all stages of the CDBG program, including program implementation, assessment of performance and design of changes in the Citizen Participation Plan. There will be three (3) general mechanisms for their involvement:

1. To serve as an advisory committee to the project;
2. To attend or hold public hearings or community meetings; and
3. To provide individual citizen efforts in the form of comments, complaints or inquiries submitted directly to the Program Administrators or designated County official.

### **PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION**

Citizen participation in program implementation will occur primarily through consultation with the County. The County will be asked to review and comment on specific guidelines for approved projects. They will also meet to review any program amendments, budget revisions and program modifications. All such changes will be discussed with the County and their comments considered prior to acting. If program amendments require approval from the North Carolina Department of Commerce, a public hearing shall be held, specifically on the amendment. Citizens may also be involved in implementation of projects specifically requiring citizen participation, such as self-help projects. Their roles will be defined as the project develops. Technical assistance will be available as needed.

### **PROGRAM ASSESSMENT**

Program assessment activities by citizens will occur in a variety of ways. A performance hearing will be held thirty to sixty (30 to 60) days prior to the start of planning for the next program year. The Program Amendment will be asked to provide citizen commentary for the Grantee Performance Report.

As a part of the orientation to the program offered at the public hearing, citizens will be invited to submit comments on all aspects of program performance through the program year. Comments should be submitted in writing to Tracie McMillan-Downer. She will respond in writing within ten (10) days. If the response is unsatisfactory, the complainant should write directly to the Chairman of the Ashe County Board of Commissioners. He shall respond within ten (10) days.

If the citizen is still dissatisfied, he/she should write to the NC Department of Commerce, Rural Economic Development Division/State CDBG Program, 4346 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-4346, Attention: Citizen

Participation Matter. Program staff will also be available during normal business hours to respond to any citizen inquiries or complaints at 919-814-4663

The Citizen Participation Plan will be subject to annual review and proposed revision, to occur in the period between the performance hearing and the public hearing on the subsequent year's application.

### **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

Technical Assistance will be provided to citizen organizations and groups of low/moderate income persons or target area residents upon request to Ashe County. Such assistance will support citizen efforts to develop proposals, define policy and organize for the implementation of the program. It is expected that such assistance will be provided directly to the County in response to their request. Assistance could be provided in the form of local presentations, informational handouts, research of a specific issue or other short-term efforts.

### **PUBLIC INFORMATION**

Ashe County will also undertake public information efforts to promote citizen participation. These efforts will include the following:

1. Public Notice of all Public Hearings will be published in the non-legal section of the local newspaper at least five (5) days before the scheduled hearing. These notices will indicate the date, time, location, and topics to be considered. These notices will also be made available in the form of press releases and as a public service announcement to local radio stations.
2. Orientation Information will be provided at the first public hearing. The Program Administrator(s) will make a presentation which covers: (a) the total amount of CDBG funds available and the competitive basis for award; (b) the range of eligible activities; (c) the planning process and the schedule of meetings and hearings; (d) the role of citizens in the program and (e) a summary of other program requirements, such as the environmental policies, fair housing provisions and contracting procedures.
3. A Public File containing program documentation will be available for review at the Ashe County Manager's Office during normal business hours. Included will be copies of the Application, Environmental Review Record, the Citizen Participation Plan and the Annual Performance Report. Other program documents are also available for citizen review on request at the County Manager's Office consistent with applicable State and local laws regarding personal privacy and obligations of confidentiality.
4. Public Hearings an interpreter will be provided for all non-English speaking individuals and/or deaf individuals.
5. Public hearing accommodations and accessibility

**Virtual Hearings** - During a declaration of a state of emergency by the Governor or General Assembly, and if a local unit of general government is concerned about significant public health risks that may result from holding an in-person public hearings, the local unit of general government may undertake a virtual public hearing (alone, or in concert with an in-person hearing) if:

- It allows questions in real time, with answers coming directly from the elected representatives to all "attendees." Therefore, members of the public must be entitled to participate and address the governing body during any telephonic or video-conference meeting.
- The governing body must post a written notice that gives the public a way to participate remotely, such as a toll-free dial-in number, and that includes an electronic copy of any agenda packet that officials will consider at the meeting.
- As with an in-person hearing, the grantee must select a virtual hearing method or platform that provides accessibility for persons with disabilities and limited English proficiency (LEP) to the greatest extent possible. These accommodations must be free to these populations.
- A governing body must provide the public with access to a recording of any telephonic or videoconference meeting.
- The local unit of government must document its efforts and the reason for them.
- Additional specific communication requirements and requirements for conducting remote meetings can be found in Article 1A of Chapter 166A and Article 33C of Chapter 143 of the General Statutes.

ADOPTED, this the 5<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2020.



Chairman, County Board of Commissioners

Ashe County, NC



County Manager

Ashe County, NC