

Athens-Clarke County Citizen Participation Plan

1. Purpose

- A. To encourage citizen participation in decision-making and processes, with particular emphasis on participation by persons of low and moderate income.
- B. To encourage participation by residents of slum and blighted areas and areas in which community development funds are proposed to be used.

2. Standards of Participation

The Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County (ACC) will adhere to the following citizen participation standards:

- A. All aspects of citizen participation shall be conducted in an open manner.
- B. Every reasonable effort shall be made to include low and moderate income persons, minorities, the elderly, handicapped, project area residents and civic groups.
- C. Citizens will be provided with timely and adequate information, as well as technical assistance.
- D. Citizens will be encouraged to express their views and submit proposals eligible for community development funds.

3. Public Hearings

The Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County will hold public hearings for the purpose of reviewing community development programs' performances; to obtain citizens' views on programs' goals and objectives; and to respond to community development funding recommendations.

Public hearings shall be held at convenient times and locations to permit broad participation, with particular consideration to low and moderate income persons and residents of blighted and deteriorating neighborhoods. In order to give adequate notice of public hearings, the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County will comply with the following requirements:

- A. Notice of all public hearings will be published as a block ad in the non-legal section of a newspaper of general circulation (such as the Athens Banner-Herald) at least 10 days prior to the time of the hearing (A possible exception to this, is program amendments, which may because of the essence of time, require occasional shorter notices).
- B. Notices will include time, date, location, amount of funding, and the topics to be discussed at the public hearing.
- C. In addition, the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County will utilize many other means of informing the public, such as through the local radio stations, digital information sources, and print media for publicizing public service announcements concerning public hearings and events.
- D. A Consolidated Plan Community Development funds (CDBG and HOME) Performance Hearing will be held at the start of the planning process (on

current fiscal year's activities) for the next program year following the same procedure used by the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County for public hearings.

- E. At least one pre-submission public hearing prior to the submission of the final Consolidated Plan (Annual Action Plan) to obtain comments on community development funding recommendations.
- F. The public is invited to express their views and opinions and comment on all aspects of the program, both past and future. Minutes are recorded of all meetings and all public hearings.

4. Development of the Annual Action Plan

ACC most often utilizes a formal application process for CDBG funding that is generally held in October-December of each year. ACC also reserves the right to address focused community development concerns through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process where entities are identified that have the capacity to carry out specific activities.

The allocation process for HOME funds leverages resources by making HOME funds available as "gap financing" for eligible housing activities as opposed to allocating funds prior to project readiness.

- A. The following program information will be provided to citizens at the beginning of the Consolidated Plan process-initial public hearing:
 - 1. The role of citizens in the Consolidated Plan.
 - 2. Total amount of community development funds available for community development and housing activities.
 - 3. Eligible activities that may be undertaken with community development funds and the type of activities previously funded.
 - 4. Estimated amount of community development funds that will benefit persons of low to moderate income.
 - 5. Procedures to be followed in the planning, preparation, and approval of the Consolidated Plan and schedule of meetings and public hearings.
 - 6. Summary of other important program requirements and proposal packages; and
 - 7. The Anti-Displacement Plan (minimizing the displacement of persons while carrying out community development funded activities; and steps to be taken if persons are displaced).
- B. The Proposed Consolidated Plan (Annual Action Plan) will be available for public review for 30 days at the following locations:

A-CC Department of Human and Economic Development

A-CC Mayor's Office

A-CC Manager's Office

A-CC Regional Library

A-CC Planning & Zoning Department

Athens Housing Authority

Northeast Georgia Regional Development Center (RDC)

Miriam Moore Community Service Center - East Athens Development Corporation
Hancock Community Development Corporation

During that period written comments will be accepted at HED. The Proposed Consolidated Plan (Annual Action Plan) will also be available on disk for citizens to check out and review; and free copies of the proposed plan will be available upon request. Comments received during the 30 public review period will be considered in the development of the final document; and a summary of those not accepted and the reasons will be attached to the Consolidated Plan.

5. Vision Advisory Committee

- A. The mission of the Vision Advisory Committee is to offer advice to HED on Consolidated Plan activities. The Athens-Clarke County Consolidated Plan is a five-year strategic plan that requires annual updates. These updates are known as Annual Action Plans. The Annual Action Plans outline CDBG and HOME funded projects. Funding categories include administration at 20%, human services at 15%, and community development at 65%. A request for proposals will be issued for 80% of the CDBG anticipated funding leaving 20% remaining for administration.
- B. HED staff will issue a request for applications, receive CDBG and HOME applications, determine eligibility, and then rate and rank applications.
- C. HED staff will present applications to the Vision Advisory Committee for comment and advice. HED will then prepare funding recommendations for the Mayor and Commission and present them at a work session prior to the final public hearing.
- D. The Mayor and Commission reserve the right to accept, modify, or reject the recommendations.

The Vision Committee meets from time to time as determined by the committee, to review the performance of sub-recipient agencies, funding decision-making processes, and related activities. The Vision Committee members are appointed through a standard ACC process where vacancies are advertised, applications are received, and interviews are held with the Mayor and Commission. Vision Committee members are appointed to five-year terms associated with the Consolidated Plan duration. All Vision Committee meetings are on ACC's government calendar.

6. Program Amendments

The Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County shall provide citizens with reasonable notice of the opportunity to comment on any proposed substantial change in the use of community development funds from one activity to another. Citizens will be allowed 10 days prior to the implementation of the amendment to give comments. A substantial change shall be one in which the funding allocation for any category of activities (i.e., Public Services, Public Facilities and Improvements, Housing, Economic Development, etc.) is either increased or decreased by an amount of 50% or greater of the amount allocated for that category. Additionally, the elimination of any approved activity or adding a new activity shall be

considered a substantial change, and procedures shall be followed in accordance with Sections II and III of this plan.

If at the end of the program year, CDBG funds are available for reprogramming, these funds will be allocated during the upcoming fiscal year's Annual Action Plan process as described in the preceding Sections V and VI. An exception to this is an urgent need identified in the community, which is an eligible CDBG activity, which may dictate a more expedient process to be employed. HED will notify the Vision Advisory Committee and the Mayor and Commission of the recommended reprogramming, the activities involved, and the funding source and amount.

The Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County shall hold and conduct a public hearing(s) when a substantial change is made as defined above. The Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County shall consider citizen comments, make the modified Annual Action Plan available to the public, and submit a copy of the modified or amended Annual Action Plan to HUD.

The Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County shall follow its previously described definition for determining if the movement of funds from one activity to another constitutes a substantial change. If, in the opinion of the Director of the Department of Human & Economic Development, the change will not substantially affect an existing activity as defined, the Director of the Human & Economic Development Department may approve the reprogramming of funds administratively.

7. Translation and Interpretation

The need does exist in the Athens community for bilingual translations. The Hispanic population has greatly increased over the past decade. Persons are asked to identify non-English speaking residents, prior to the public hearings, so that adequate arrangements can be made to accommodate such citizens.

8. Performance Reports

The Consolidated Plan Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER) will be available for citizen's' review for a period of at least 15 days to receive comments prior to submission to HUD. The public will be notified (see Section III) at least 10 days prior to the public review period.

9. Availability to the Public

The Consolidated Plan as adopted, substantial amendments, and the performance report will be available to the public, including the availability of materials in a form accessible to persons with disabilities, upon request.

10. Records Access

Citizens, public agencies and other interested parties will be provided with reasonable and timely access to information and records relating to the Consolidated Plan and the use of assistance under the programs covered during the preceding three years.

11. Technical Assistance

To facilitate citizen participation, the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County will offer technical assistance through staff or other resources. Technical assistance will be directed toward assisting organizations in preparing proposals and in carrying out community development program activities; and technical assistance will be available to groups of low and moderate income persons and groups to residents of blighted neighborhoods. The level and type of assistance shall be determined by the Department of Human and Economic Development. Any citizen, club, or organization desiring technical assistance should contact:

Department of Human and Economic Development
P. O. Box 1868
375 Satula Avenue
Athens, Georgia 30601
(706) 613-3155
(706) 613-3158 fax

12. Consideration of Objections to the Consolidated Plan

Persons wishing to object to the content of the Consolidated Plan (Annual Action Plan) should discuss the objection with the Director of the Department of Human and Economic Development and the Mayor prior to making the objection known to the HUD Atlanta Office. Objections should be submitted within 30 days after the Consolidated Plan is on public review. The sole responsibility and authority to make such final determination on objections rests exclusively with the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County

HUD will consider objections made only on the following grounds: the applicant's description of needs and objectives is plainly inconsistent with available facts and data; the activities to be undertaken are plainly inappropriate in meeting the needs and objectives identified by the applicant; the application does not comply with the requirements of HUD or other applicable laws; or the application proposed activities which are otherwise ineligible under CDBG and HOME regulations.

13. Complaint Procedures

The following outlines a procedure to respond to citizens' complaints in a timely and responsive manner.

- A. Complaints are addressed to the Director of the Department of Human and Economic Development, P. O. Box 1868, 375 Satula Avenue, Athens, Georgia 30601.
- B. Action is initiated on the complaint the day it is received in the HED office.
- C. The complaint is documented and referred to the appropriate individual, department or agency for action. Following department or agency response, the complainant is then contacted by the

Department of Human and Economic Development as a follow-up for resolution of the complaint in writing.

- D. The time frame of responding to a complaint varies, depending on the nature of the grievance and what action needs to be taken. However, the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County shall make “every reasonable effort” to provide a written response within 15 working days.
- E. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response, the recourse is to forward the complaint in a letter to the Mayor, 301 College Avenue, Athens, Georgia 30601. In the event the complainant still is not satisfied with the response, an official complaint may be addressed to HUD, according to CDBG regulations. HUD’s procedures will be provided upon request to the complainant by the staff of the Department of Human and Economic Development.