


City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 29, 2009
TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL
FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 
SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF THE REVISED CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PLAN FOR HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

ISSUE: City Council consideration of the Revised Citizen Participation Plan for Housing and Community Development Activities

RECOMMENDATION: That the City Council approve the Revised Citizen Participation Plan (attached).

BACKGROUND: The Citizen Participation Plan was first adopted in November 1995. The Plan is a requirement of the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to provide residents of Alexandria, particularly very low- and low-income persons, with an understanding of their role in the development, implementation and assessment of housing and community development activities, and to encourage their participation in the formulation of the Consolidated Plan for Housing and Community Development, and any substantial amendments to the Plan, Annual Action Plan, and the Consolidated Annual Performance Reports (CAPER).

DISCUSSION: The basic elements of the Citizen Participation Plan have not changed. The Consolidated Plan and annual Action Plans continue to require two public hearings – one held by staff and one by City Council – and a 30-day public comment period that encompasses the Council public hearing. Program amendments are also subject to a 30-day comment period with a public hearing, and performance reports are distributed for a 15-day comment period without a public hearing requirement.

Language has been added to the revised Plan to allow for HUD-authorized shortened comment periods for program amendments, such as those associated with HUD stimulus funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), and to eliminate the public hearing requirement for such shorter periods unless otherwise required by HUD. These stimulus-related changes were added subsequent to the distribution of the Revised Citizen Participation Plan for public comment.

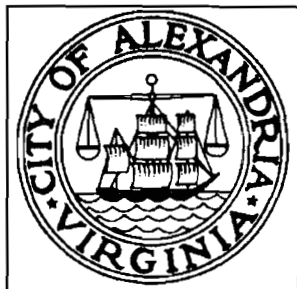
Other revisions to the Citizen Participation Plan (included in the public comment distribution) largely reflect updates to allow for electronic transmission of the Consolidated Plan and related documents and notices, with hard copies provided on request. The revised document also reflects the current practice of posting the Consolidated Plan, Action Plans, annual performance reports on the City's website, and provides for the posting of program amendments as well. In addition, the description of entities on the distribution list to receive such information has been updated to remove the previous target area focus and encompass interested civic associations and businesses throughout the City. (Although the list has never been restricted and has always been open to any interested party, its description in the Citizen Participation Plan had become outdated.) Technical updates (e.g., changes in contact information) have also been made.

The complete Revised Citizen Participation Plan was released for a 30-day comment period with no comments received. City Council held the public hearing on this item on April 18, and there were no public speakers.

ATTACHMENT: Revised Citizen Participation Plan for Housing and Community Development Activities

STAFF:

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Eric Keeler, Division Chief for Program Administration, Office of Housing
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CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA
CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PLAN FOR HOUSING
AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Revised 2009
November 1995
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**CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA
CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PLAN FOR
HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES**

1. Introduction

This Citizen Participation Plan has been prepared in accordance with U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) regulations at 24 CFR Part 91 on Community Planning and Development Programs Consolidation published February 6, 1995 and amended February 9, 2006. This plan updates the Citizen Participation Plan approved by City Council in 1995.

The purpose of this Citizen Participation Plan is to provide residents of Alexandria, particularly very low and low- income persons and those living in the City's targeted revitalization areas, with an understanding of their role in the development, implementation and assessment of housing and community development activities and to encourage their participation in the formulation of the Consolidated Plan for Housing and Community Development ("Consolidated Plan"), any amendments to the Plan and performance reports.

The Consolidated Plan is a requirement for participation in the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and Home Investment Partnerships (HOME) Programs, under which the City is an entitlement grantee, as well as the Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG) and Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) Programs. The City is not an entitlement grantee under the ESG and HOPWA Programs; however, ESG funds are provided through the State and HOPWA funds are awarded to the entire metropolitan area and distributed to local jurisdictions.

The Consolidated Plan is the City's single planning and application submission to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for participation in these programs. The Consolidated Plan is intended to be a collaborative process whereby the City, with the input of its residents, establishes a unified vision for housing and community development actions.

2. Organizations Involved in or Affected by Housing and Community Development Activities

The City will maintain a list of organizations whose membership or clientele may be affected by the Consolidated Plan and/or CDBG- and HOME Program-funded activities. Each organization will be asked to select a representative who will receive information preferably via email and provide input into the development of the Consolidated Plan and the operation of the City's services and activities funded by the Community Development Block Grant, Home Investment Partnerships, and other housing and community development programs.

The list shall consist of the following types of organizations:

- A. City Boards and Commissions with an interest in housing issues or any of the special populations whose housing needs are addressed in the Consolidated Plan;
- B. Homeless shelter and/or service providers;
- C. Civic associations;
- D. Businesses throughout the City and economic development organizations; and
- E. Alexandria-based organizations representing or serving very low- and low- income persons throughout the City or expressly concerned with addressing the housing and community development needs of such persons.

The City reserves the right to add new organizations or remove non-participating organizations (i.e., those that elect not to designate a representative or otherwise elect not to participate) as needed.

The City will ask that these organizations designate a representative to serve as a contact person and provide an email address. These designated persons will be invited to attend at least one public hearing per year, which will be the staff-level public hearing held prior to the development of the five-year and annual updates to the Consolidated Plan. This hearing will include a discussion on past performance, housing and community development needs and the development of goals and objectives. The designated representatives will be provided with electronic copies of the Draft Consolidated Plan (every five years) and Draft Action Plan (annually), and notified via email if available of the City Council public hearing on these draft plans, which will be held in the spring of each year. Hard copies of Plans will be available upon request.

Prior to City Council consideration of formal amendments to CDBG and/or HOME Program activities, as well as other, not previously mentioned, plans and reports requiring public review, the City will disseminate these items to the designated representatives. Material will be provided to the designated representative of each organization in sufficient time to allow comments and input. In addition, designated representatives will be notified of relevant public hearings.

3. Information to be Provided

Prior to the adoption of the Consolidated Plan, the City will make available to the designated representatives of interested organizations (as described above), public agencies and other interested parties, information that includes the amount of CDBG and HOME assistance the City anticipates and the range of activities that may be undertaken. This information will include the amount that

will benefit persons of very low- and low- income and plans to minimize displacement of persons and to assist any persons who are displaced. In addition, the City will provide information to the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA) about housing and community development plan activities that will have an impact on public housing communities and surrounding neighborhoods. This information will be made available by ARHA at its annual public hearing conducted as a required part of the Capital Fund Program planning process.

A summary of the proposed Consolidated Plan will be published in at least one newspaper of general circulation in the City of Alexandria. The proposed plan, amendments and reports will be posted to the City's Web site at www.alexandriava.gov, distributed to designated representatives of interested organizations (as described previously) and made available at public libraries and at the Office of Housing for public review. In accordance with federal requirements, the City will provide at least the required period of time for citizen comments to be received on the Consolidated Plan (e.g., 30 days), amendments to the Consolidated Plan or Citizen Participation Plan (e.g., 30 days), and required reports (e.g., 15 days) prior to submission to HUD. Citizens will be also notified of the availability of the City's final Consolidated Plan, as adopted, any amendments, and its performance report, to afford citizens a reasonable opportunity for review.

4. Public Hearings

The Consolidated Plan regulations include a requirement that the City conduct at least two public hearings per year to obtain citizens' views. The hearings must be held at two different stages of the program year and together must address housing and community development needs, development of proposed activities and review of program performance. One of the two required hearings must be held before the proposed Consolidated Plan is published for comment. The City will meet this requirement by holding one hearing each fall prior to the submission of the City's annual performance report. This hearing will be conducted by staff to allow citizen input on the City's prior year performance under the covered HUD programs, as well as housing, homeless and community development needs. The second hearing will be held in the spring at a City Council Public Hearing. This hearing will allow for public comment on the draft plan, including the proposed activities for the upcoming grant year, prior to its finalization and submission to HUD.

The City will provide not less than two weeks notice to the public of the time, location and subject of all public hearings. Such notices will be published in at least one newspaper of general circulation in Alexandria. An abbreviated notice in Spanish will be placed in a newspaper of general circulation, and a full public hearing notice will be placed in at least one Spanish language news publication, which has a circulation that includes the City of Alexandria. Whenever the City anticipates that a significant number of non-English speaking residents can reasonably be expected to attend a public hearing, translation services will be made available. Other special requests from individuals with special needs will also be accommodated, whenever possible, with adequate advance notice.

All public hearings will be held in the evenings or on Saturdays at City Hall. City Hall is fully accessible to persons with mobility impairments. Accommodations for persons with hearing or visual impairments will be made upon request.

In addition to the hearings to be conducted by the Office of Housing, various other departments/agencies as well as boards and commissions hold meetings and hearings relating to the homeless, persons with mental illness and substance abuse problems, and persons with AIDS/HIV. See section 10 of this Plan for more information.

5. Access to Records

The City will provide citizens, public agencies and other interested parties with reasonable and timely access to information and records relating to the City's use of assistance under the HOME, CDBG and other programs funded by HUD during the preceding five years. This information will be available for review at the Office of Housing, 421 King Street, Suite 200, during regular office hours (8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday). Requests for difficult to access records, voluminous records or for group inspection of records may require advance scheduling. Citizens should call the Office of Housing at (703) 746-4990 with regard to these types of requests. In some cases, the City may require that such information be requested under the Freedom of Information Act, in which case the Office of Housing will refer citizens to the Citizen Assistance Office for further assistance.

6. Technical Assistance

Groups representative of very low- and low- income persons may request technical assistance from the City in developing proposals for funding assistance under any of the programs covered by the Consolidated Plan. The City will, at its discretion, determine whether to provide the technical assistance directly, or to provide funding at a level to be determined by the City. It is important to note that certain regulatory restrictions apply to funding under both the CDBG and HOME Programs.

Requests for technical assistance must be made in writing and should be sent to the attention of the Program Administration Division, Office of Housing, 421 King Street, Suite 200, Alexandria, VA 22314.

7. Comments and Complaints

The City of Alexandria will consider any comments or views of citizens received in writing, or orally at public hearings, on the preparation of the Consolidated Plan, amendments to the Plan, and performance reports. A summary of all comments or views, as well as how they were addressed in the relevant document (or, if applicable, why they could not be accommodated), will be included in the final Consolidated Plan, amendments to the Plan, or performance reports.

With regard to citizen complaints, the City will make every reasonable effort to issue a written response to every written complaint or grievance within 15 working days of receipt. When this is not possible, the City shall, within 15 working days of receipt, issue a letter indicating the status of the complaint review and the approximate anticipated date of a complete response.

8. Amendments to the Consolidated Plan

The Consolidated Plan regulations require that the City amend its approved Consolidated Plan whenever it makes one of the following decisions:

- A. To make a substantial change in its allocation priorities or a substantial change in the method of distribution of funds;
- B. To carry out an activity, using funds from any program covered by the Consolidated Plan regulations (including program income), not previously described in the annual action plan portion of the Consolidated Plan; and
- C. To substantially change the purpose, scope, location or beneficiaries of an activity included in the annual action plan.

HUD regulations do not define the term "substantial," leaving this definition to the discretion of the City. The City considers a substantial change to include: a change in the targeted beneficiary group of a program or activity; or a change resulting in the reduction of the budget for any activity by more than 50%.

Amendments to the Consolidated Plan will be made public and submitted to HUD for approval prior to the implementation of any changes embodied in the amendment. Citizens will be provided with reasonable notice of the changes and an opportunity of not less than 30 days (unless otherwise provided by HUD) to comment on the proposed changes. Copies of amendments to the Plan will be made available to the public at the time they are submitted to HUD. Public hearings will be held during 30-day public comment periods, but the City may elect not to hold such hearings during HUD-authorized shorter comment periods, unless otherwise required by HUD.

9. Adoption of the Citizen Participation Plan

The City will provide citizens with a reasonable opportunity to comment on any amendments to this Citizen Participation Plan. The City will advertise the availability of any amendments as well as the date and time of a public hearing on the matter. Copies of the Plan will be made available on the Office of Housing Web site at www.alexandriava.gov, at the public libraries, and upon request to the Office of Housing. With reasonable advance notice, the City will make reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities who require assistance in accessing the report.

10. Information on Citizen Participation Opportunities Through Other Programs/Departments/Agencies

In an effort to provide citizens with information on other opportunities for input into activities covered by the Consolidated Plan, the following information is provided on other departments and agencies.

The City's Department of Human Services seeks to meet the needs of the City's homeless, elderly and others in need. Because the City is not an entitlement community under the Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG) Program, the Department of Human Services and various non-profit organizations serving the homeless receive annual allocations of ESG funding through the Commonwealth of Virginia. The ESG funds can be used for rehabilitation, renovation, and/or conversion of buildings to be used as facilities to assist the homeless, as well as for social services and operating costs associated with homeless facilities.

The Department of Human Services works in conjunction with several citizen advisory boards which include: the Social Services Advisory Board; the Economic Opportunities Commission; the Alexandria Commission on Employment; the Commission on Persons with Disabilities; and the Commission on Aging. These citizen boards meet regularly and must approve applications for grants, which fall under their areas of interest. Public hearings are held if required by the regulations of the grant program, or the citizen advisory board elects to hold a hearing to receive public input. In addition, all funding applications must be approved by City Council. The Agency on Aging, a division of the Department of Human Services, does hold an annual public hearing, as required by the Virginia Department for the Aging, in the late spring to determine needs and to plan services for the elderly. This information is developed into an annual Aging Plan for Services, and allows for the receipt of federal and state funds. The Plan is considered by City Council and, upon City Council approval, is forwarded to the State. The Department of Human Services can be contacted at (703) 838-0710 for more information on the citizen boards and programs.

The Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse applies for and utilizes a variety of funding programs. The Department works with the Community Services Board, a citizen advisory committee which holds an annual public hearing in the spring for the purpose of planning. The Board also must approve all applications for funding. If City funding is involved in the application, City Council must consider and approve the application. In addition, the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse may from time to time apply for funding programs which require a public hearing. Those hearings are scheduled as necessary and notice is given to the public through various means. For more information on the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse or the Community Services Board, contact (703) 838-4455.

The Alexandria Health Department, along with the City's Department of Mental Health,

Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse (MH/MR/SA), the INOVA Juniper Program, Northern Virginia Family Services, and other public and non-profit organizations work together to receive funding under the federal Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) program. The District of Columbia's Administration for HIV/AIDS has been designated by the federal administering agency, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), as the entity that must apply for and receive HOPWA grant funds for the region. The Northern Virginia Regional Commission receives funds from the Administration and manages and distributes it within the region.

The Northern Virginia Planning District Commission should be contacted at (703) 838-4400 for more information on the HOPWA program, and the Alexandria Health Department should be contacted at (703) 838-4400 for other related programs.

The Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA) receives funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development through a variety of programs. One of these is the Capital Fund Program, which includes a citizen participation component. This program provides approximately \$1.5 - 2.5 million per year to ARHA for physical and management improvements. The goals of the program include: upgrading living conditions; correcting physical deficiencies; and achieving operating efficiency. As part of the annual planning and application process for the Capital Fund Program, ARHA holds an annual public hearing in September of each year. In addition to the Capital Fund Program public hearing, citizens may attend the monthly ARHA Board of Commissioners meetings. For more information on the Capital Fund Program public hearing, ARHA Board meetings or other ARHA programs, please call (703) 549-7115.