

ALLEGANY COUNTY COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

Program Guidelines

I. Purpose

The Allegany County Community Enhancement Program is designed to assist municipalities in addressing community development needs unique to their community. The program will use Revolving Building Funds from Allegany County as its funding source. As such, economic development is a key element of this initiative.

The purpose of the program is to provide grant funds to municipalities within Allegany County for the purposes of purchasing and demolishing blighted residential buildings and financing business building improvements, thus assisting in the elimination of blight. The cumulative impact of each activity shall be to enhance the overall appearance of the community and create a clean, safe and attractive image conducive to commerce.

II. Program Objectives

Program objectives are as follows:

- A. To improve the overall appearance of the residential areas and business areas.
- B. To improve the business climate of the municipality increasing sales and sales tax revenues.
- C. To assist in the elimination or prevention of blight thereby improving property values and enhancing the real estate tax base.

III. Definitions

Blight: The definition will be as stated in the statutes of the municipal applicant.

IV. Eligibility

A. Eligible Recipients

All the municipalities in Allegany County are eligible; Barton, Cumberland, Frostburg, Lonaconing, Luke, Midland and Westernport. Applications have to be made by an eligible recipient.

B. Conflict of Interest

No member of the governing body of either Allegany County or the municipality and no other official, employee, or agent of Allegany County or the municipality who exercises policy, decision-making functions or responsibilities in connection with the planning and implementation of the program shall directly or indirectly receive the benefit of this program. This ineligibility shall continue for a five-year period after an individual's relationship with Allegany County or the municipality ends.

C. Anti-Discrimination

No person or persons shall be excluded from participation in, denied the benefit of, or be subjected to discrimination under any portion of this program or activity on the basis of his or her religion or religious affiliation, age, race, color, ancestry, national origin, sex, marital status, familial status, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation or other arbitrary cause.

D. Property

The municipal applicant must ensure that residential buildings to be acquired and demolished, or business properties to be improved, are located within the municipal jurisdiction. There can be overlap between the two aims of the program, eliminating blight in residential areas and improving business appearances. Blighted business properties in residential areas can be purchased and demolished if it eliminates blight in the area. A business property to be improved can include a residential element such as the case of a residence over a retail business.

E. Occupancy

No portions of these funds may be used for the purposes of relocation of businesses or residents. Municipalities wishing to avail themselves of this program are responsible for paying any necessary relocation cost or for the property owners to be responsible for such costs.

V. Method of Assistance

A. Order

Priority will be given to those municipal projects, which in the opinion of Allegany County, will have the greatest impact on improving the appearance of the communities' residential areas and business districts. Another consideration will be the levels of increased sales activities and increases in tax revenues anticipated to be generated by eliminating blight in a given residential area and a given facade improvement project. In those instances where there are insufficient funds available to fund approved applications, program staff shall have the discretion to establish and prioritize a waiting list for funding based on priorities established in these guidelines.

B. Types of Assistance

1. Purchase and Demolition of Blighted Properties

Allegany County will provide grant funds to qualified grant applicants for the purchase of blighted properties and for the demolition of blighted properties. No buildings will be allowed to be buried on site. Besides the demolition and removal of debris of the blighted property, demolition will include the following:

Capping of utility lines

Backfilling foundation

Seeding and mulching as needed

2. Façade Improvement Grant/Commercial Revitalization

Allegany County will provide grant funds to qualified grant applicants for the costs of construction including, as appropriate, design, permits, labor and materials. The following types of improvements can be financed using this program:

Facade construction

Masonry restoration

Painting

Awning replacement

Sign removal and replacement

Trim work

Storefront window

Utility piping removal

Lighting improvements

Landscaping

Other improvements considered reasonable.

In addition to the above improvements, improvements such as those listed below may also be eligible as part of a comprehensive façade makeover:

Window repairs

Kick plates

Fencing

Door repairs

Trash enclosures and receptacles

Security improvements

C. Amount of Assistance & Required Match

1. Up to \$15,000, no match required
2. \$15,000 up to \$50,000, 50% in-kind match or combination of cash
3. \$50,000 up to \$100,000, 25% in-kind match, and a 25% cash match
4. \$100,000 and greater, 50% cash match

D. Terms of Assistance

The program will provide grants within the following guidelines:

1. For any approved assistance, Allegany County will only reimburse funds spent and will not advance funds.
2. Grant funds from Allegany County cannot reimburse salaries.
3. The municipality cannot request multiple Allegany County grants for the same project, match requirements cannot be avoided by a phase approach. Allegany County does not intend the municipality to avoid match requirements by breaking a single grant into multiple grants.
4. For in-kind services, documentation will have to be provided to Allegany County to verify the amount. Salaries included as part of a match have to be limited to only the scope of the project, and again documentation needs to be provided to Allegany County.
5. The source of matching funds must be clearly identified.
6. Project applications will be rated on their success in leveraging other grant sources.

7. Grant funds must be used for the activities covered under Types of Assistance in Section B. It can cover both acquisition and demolition of blighted properties.

8. The property must be located in the jurisdiction of the applicant municipality.

9. The ownership of the property must be clear and written consent from the property owner is required. In the case of blighted properties, the municipality has to have title to the property.

10. For façade improvements, there has to be compatibility with the local development theme and all building ordinances. Blight removal has to aim to improve the appearance of the residential area.

11. In the case of a façade improvement or other commercial revitalization activities, the building owner must obtain all necessary permits and the municipality needs to establish deadlines for the work to begin and finish. In the case of both façade improvement and blight removal, the municipality will be responsible for ensuring all appropriate rules and regulations, including State and Federal, will be followed. All necessary governmental permits and/or approvals shall be obtained by the municipality or property owner.

12. All work needs to be inspected by a municipal official.

13. In the case of façade improvements or other commercial revitalization activities, the building owner must maintain all improvements and keep storefronts, as well as sides and back of buildings clean, free of graffiti and landscaped for a minimum of five (5) years at the owner's own cost and expense. Any damage to the façade is to be repaired immediately by the owner so that the building remains in good condition and positively contributes to the business area. On an ongoing basis, the owner is required to touch up painted areas and perform any other repairs needed to maintain the building appearance including the cleaning of the storefront annually. In the case of demolition of blighted properties, the municipality will maintain the lot so that it doesn't become a detriment to the residential area.

E. General Procurement Provisions

The general requirements for procurement include the following:

1. The municipality must maintain records to detail the history of a procurement. These records include, but are not limited to, files on the rationale for selecting the methods of procurement used.

2. Pre-qualified lists of vendors/contractors, if used, must be current, developed through open solicitation, include adequate numbers of qualified sources, and must allow entry of other firms to qualify at any time during the solicitation period.

3. The municipality must ensure that awards are not made to any party which is debarred or suspended or is otherwise excluded from or ineligible for participation in Federal or State assistance programs.

4. The municipality must ensure that all work performed is done by a contractor licensed and bonded in Maryland or a qualified owner builder.

5. There must be written selection procedures for procurement transactions, and the procedures must be adequate to ensure that:

i. The purchase of unnecessary or duplicate items is avoided.

ii. All purchase orders (and contracts) are signed by the authorized official(s) of the municipality or the owner of the property;

iii. Items delivered and paid for are consistent with the purchase order and/or contract for the goods or services;

iv. Timely payment to vendors occurs once the order is delivered, inspected, accepted, and payment authorized;

VI. Application and Approval Process

A. Applications

The municipality needs to demonstrate that the project is consistent with its comprehensive or strategic plan.

There will be no formal application to complete, but rather the applicant municipality will provide a written proposal to Allegany County with as much supporting documentation as needed to explain the proposed project. There is no formal deadline for when an application has to be made. Applications can be made to Allegany County as the need arises. There is also no limit to the number of applications any particular municipality can make to Allegany County. The formal contact for submitting any proposal is David Nedved, Economic and Community Development Representative, at 301-777-5967 or dnedved@alleganygov.org. The proposals, however, will be considered and approved or denied by the Board of County Commissioners. Each proposal will stand on its own merits and Allegany County will provide recommendations and suggest changes.

The proposal must be completed by the applicant municipality and should include information on where the businesses and/or houses are located, what improvements are planned and dollar amount requested. These guidelines can serve as a basis for questions that need to be addressed in any proposal.

B. Application Approvals and Denials

The Board of County Commissioners will formally approve any approved applications at a public meeting. For proposals that are denied, Allegany County staff may offer the applicant feedback on the proposal and provide recommendations for a future application.

The intention is for every proposal to be strongly considered but the applicant municipality has to keep in mind the available funds for the program are limited and the County desires that grant funds be used as effectively as possible. The proposals will be evaluated to determine the extent to which the project meets a need and the seriousness of the problem or need. Any project that addresses a documented public health or safety need(s) or is identified through a community planning process will receive extra consideration for approval. This program is subject to an annual appropriation by the County and will only entertain applications when funds have been appropriated by the Board of County Commissioners. The Board of Allegany County Commissioners shall use its discretion in awarding grants. All decisions of the Board of County Commissioners will be final and are not subject to further review.

D. Grant Agreement

If approved by the Board of County Commissioners, Allegany County staff will prepare the appropriate Grant Agreement. The Agreement will be approved by the Allegany County Commissioners and the Mayor and Council of the municipality.

E. Grant Distribution

Allegany County will reimburse the recipient municipality for costs they paid. Allegany County will reimburse the municipality within thirty (30) days of a draw request submittal. Allegany County staff will have to approve improvements, purchases, and/or services for the match where one was required. Draw requests may be submitted to Allegany County as a work in progress, meaning the recipient may submit draw requests for work done on the project before the entire project has been completed. However, the final ten percent (10%) of Allegany County's reimbursement match will be retained until the completion of the project.