

**In light of COVID-19 and the need for social distancing Graham County is posting the below Citizen Participation Plan for Public Comment. The public comment period will be for 5 days beginning 10/19/2020.**

**CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PLAN FOR CDBG-I GRANTEES**

CDBG Recipient/Grantee Name:	GRAHAM COUNTY
CDBG Recipient/Grantee Mailing Address:	12 N. MAIN STREET, ROBBINSVILLE NC 28771
CDBG Recipient/Grantee Physical Address <i>(if different from mailing):</i>	196 KNIGHT STREET, ROBBINSVILLE NC 28771
Contact Person & Title:	BECKY GARLAND, COUNTY MANAGER
Contact Email:	BECKY.GARLAND@GRAHAMCOUNTY.ORG
Contact Phone Number:	828-479-7960
TDD#:	711

**I. PURPOSE AND INTRODUCTION**

**Graham County** has designed this community-wide Citizen Participation Plan to provide for and encourage citizen participation in the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program.

This Plan is an essential element of **Graham County’s** present and future community development process and has been developed to comply with the regulations and requirements of the CDBG program as administered by the North Carolina. The Citizen Participation Plan is required by Section 104(a)(2) of the Housing and Community Development Act and by regulations at 24 CFR 570.486(a)(6).

The primary goal of this Citizen Participation Plan is to provide all citizens of the community with adequate opportunity to participate in an advisory role in the planning, implementation, and assessment of **Graham County’s** CDBG program(s) and project(s).

The Plan sets forth policies and procedures for citizen participation, which are designed to maximize the opportunity for citizen participation in the community development process. Special emphasis has been placed on encouraging participation by persons of low and moderate incomes, residents of blighted neighborhoods, and residents of areas where community development funds are utilized.

The plan is vitally important to the success of CDBG-funded activities undertaken by local units of general government. Compliance with the plan reduces the number of legal challenges and citizen complaints against the local government recipient.

Local units of general government must provide citizens with reasonable advance notice of and opportunity to comment on proposed activities in an application to the state; and for grants already made, the same opportunities must be provided for activities proposed to be added, deleted, or substantially changed from the original application to the state. Substantially changes include, but not limited to, purpose, scope, location or beneficiaries.

Citizens are encouraged to participate in all phases of the CDBG program(s) and will be provided full access to program information. However, final responsibility and authority for the development and implementation of CDBG program(s) will lie with the **Graham County**.

## **2. SCOPE OF PARTICIPATION**

**Graham County** will make reasonable efforts to provide for citizen participation during the community development process and throughout the planning, implementation and assessment of all CDBG program(s) undertaken by the **Graham County**. Local officials will make every effort to involve citizens in all phases of the development, implementation and assessment of community development programs including, but not limited to, the following phases:

- a. Identification and assessment of housing and community development needs; determination of CDBG project(s) and documentation; and the development of CDBG application(s);
- b. Changes and/or amendments to approved CDBG projects; and,
- c. Assessment of CDBG program performance.

All phases of the community development process will be conducted by local officials in an open manner. Citizens of the **Graham County** are encouraged to participate at all levels and will be given access to program information during each phase of any CDBG program as outlined herein.

## **3. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION CONTACT PERSON**

**Becky Garland** has been designated Citizen Participation Coordinator by the and will serve as the contact person for all matters concerning citizen participation activities. This person shall be responsible for overseeing citizen participation throughout the community development process and the implementation of all citizen participation activities and functions, except those which may be specifically delegated to other parties by this Plan.

The specific duties and responsibilities of the Citizen Participation Coordinator shall include, but not necessarily be limited to: disseminating information concerning proposed projects and the status of current project activities; coordinating various groups which may be participating in the community development process; receiving written comments; serving as a vehicle by which ideas, comments, and proposals from local residents may be transmitted to local officials and/or program staff; and, monitoring the citizen participation process and proposing such amendments to the Citizen Participation Plan as may be necessary.

The Citizen Participation Coordinator may be contacted at **Graham County, 196 Knight Street, Robbinsville NC 28771, 828-479-7960** during regular business hours. All questions concerning citizen

participation in the community development process should be addressed to the Citizen Participation Coordinator.

#### 4. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The staff of **Graham County** shall provide technical assistance to individual citizens and citizen groups, especially those groups representative of persons of low or moderate income, as may be required to adequately provide for citizen participation in the planning, implementation and assessment of CDBG program(s).

Such technical assistance is intended to increase citizen participation in the community development decision making process and to ensure that such participation is meaningful. Technical assistance shall also be utilized to foster public understanding of CDBG program requirements.

Technical assistance shall be provided on request and may include, but not necessarily be limited to: interpreting the CDBG program and its rules, regulations, procedures and/or requirements; providing information and/or materials concerning the CDBG program; and, assisting low and moderate income citizens, and residents of blighted neighborhoods to develop statements of views, identify their needs, and to develop activities and proposals for projects which, when implemented, will resolve those needs.

Technical assistance may be obtained by contacting the **Chief Elected Official** of **Graham County** or the Citizen Participation Coordinator.

#### 5. PUBLIC HEARINGS

Citizen participation in the community development process will be conducted on a community-wide basis and will actively involve the views and proposals of all citizens, especially low and moderate income persons and residents of areas where CDBG activities are proposed or on-going.

Public hearings will be held during all phases of the community development process, as outlined herein, to allow citizens to voice opinions and offer proposals concerning the development and performance of CDBG programs. Local officials will respond to questions and proposals from citizens at each public hearing. Any questions that citizens may have concerning a program will be answered and their comments, suggestions, and/or proposals will be received. Citizens may also express comments and views concerning the community development process or any specific CDBG project to the governing body at any regularly scheduled meeting.

##### PUBLIC HEARING TIMES AND LOCATIONS

All public hearings will be held at times and locations which will be accessible to all citizens, especially persons of low and moderate incomes, and residents of blighted neighborhoods and CDBG project areas.

Public hearings will be scheduled for convenient times as determined by **Graham County**. Public hearings may be held at any site which, in the opinion of **Graham County** provides adequate access for citizen participation.

Hearings will normally be held at the **196 Knight Street, Robbinsville NC 28771**. This site is centrally located and generally accessible to all citizens. This building is also accessible to persons with disabilities. Hearings may, however, at the option of the **County**, be held at an alternate location to be specified in the public hearing notice(s).

## APPLICATION PUBLIC HEARING

Public hearings shall be held during any CDBG program fiscal year prior to the submission of an application to the State for CDBG assistance. The primary purposes of the public hearing shall be to assess community needs and problems in an effort to determine the most critical needs to be addressed by the CDBG program; and also to present for public comment and review the program activities which have been selected by the **Graham County** to resolve the identified needs.

An application public hearing will be held during the initial stage of program development to discuss items regarding community development and housing needs, the CDBG program, and the application process. The objective of citizen participation at this stage is to provide meaningful, community-wide citizen input into the decision-making process during the assessment of community needs and the consideration of priorities and options associated with the development and submission of a CDBG application. Local officials will also entertain proposals and comments from citizens concerning community development activities at this hearing.

This hearing will normally serve to discuss and review the information appropriate for all applications submitted by **Graham County** during any fiscal year. Additional changes in community development or housing needs in the community as determined by local officials can be addressed by a community meeting where citizens can share their comments prior to the submission of other CDBG applications late in the fiscal year.

Citizens will be provided with information concerning the CDBG program at this public hearing. Such information shall include, but not necessarily be limited to: the goals and objectives of the CDBG program; the total amount of CDBG funds available for the fiscal year and for the funding round; the role of citizens in program planning, implementation, and assessment; the range of activities which may be undertaken; the process to be followed in developing a CDBG application; a statement that 100 percent of the CDBG funds will be used to benefit low-to-moderate income people; the schedule of meetings and hearings; location where the application can be reviewed; activities previously funded in **Graham County** through the CDBG program; and, an identification of projects which could result in the relocation of area residences or businesses; and the actions that would be undertaken if such relocation were necessary; provide citizens with contact information such as address, telephone number, and dates for submitting complaints or grievances. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the Citizen Participation Plan in allowing citizen participation in the community development process and potential changes and/or amendments to the Plan shall also be discussed at this meeting.

**Graham County** may, at the option of local officials, review multiple CDBG project applications at one hearing when more than one application is to be submitted during the same fiscal year. Each such hearing shall be held prior to, and in preparation for, the application's approval by the **County**.

A second objective of citizen participation during this stage is to inform citizens of the proposed project activities to be included in a CDBG application(s) and to solicit comments from citizens concerning these activities.

Citizens attending this hearing will be provided with information concerning the CDBG project(s) proposed including, but not necessarily limited to: the project application(s) to be submitted and the applicable CDBG fund; specific project activities to be included; the location of the project activities; the

approximate cost estimate for the proposed activities; the estimate of local match required; the impact of the project on low and moderate income persons; and, the approximate application submittal date.

#### PROJECT AMENDMENT PUBLIC HEARINGS

**Graham County** will assure the opportunity for citizen participation during the implementation of any CDBG program(s) when changes to the project are under consideration by the **County**. Citizen participation shall be obtained and considered in any amendments to a CDBG program which involves changes in dollar amount spent on any activity, changes in program beneficiaries, changes in the location of approved activities, addition to or deletion of project activities, and major budget shifts between approved activities.

To ensure adequate opportunity for citizen participation during CDBG programs, **Graham County** shall hold a public hearing on all formal amendments which require the State approval. For “local” amendments and changes for which the State approval is not required, input from citizens concerning changes or amendments will be received at regularly scheduled **County** meetings where such changes or amendments are considered.

#### ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE (CLOSE-OUT) PUBLIC HEARINGS

This public hearing must be held after all third-party contracts’ payments have been submitted.

Citizens of **Graham County** will be provided with the opportunity to comment on the performance of local officials, the **County** staff, consultants, engineers, and contractors, and the actual use of CDBG funds during the implementation of a CDBG program. Citizens will also be requested to assess the performance of the **County** in resolving identified community development and housing needs, and in achieving its community development goals and objectives. On-going community assessment of the effectiveness of the community development process is considered essential to the success of the CDBG program.

At the conclusion of each CDBG project, a public hearing will be held to review program activities and to assess program performance. This hearing shall be held prior to the submission of the Performance Assessment Report and any other required closeout documents to the State for a CDBG project. This hearing will be used to ensure community-wide participation in the evaluation of the CDBG program.

#### ADDITIONAL HEARINGS

Other public hearings may be held as deemed necessary by **Graham County** in order to inform citizens of community development project(s) and activities, and to solicit citizen opinions and comments. All additional hearings shall comply with the requirements set forth in this Plan.

## 6. 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 hearing, 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.

### LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY RESIDENTS

**Graham County** has followed the guidance provided in the Language Access Plan (LAP) to determine the need to undertake reasonable actions to facilitate the participation of persons with Limited English Proficiency. Local officials will undertake all reasonable actions necessary to allow such persons to participate in the community development process. Such actions may include the provision of an interpreter and/or the provision of materials in the appropriate language or format for persons with Limited English Proficiency.

### PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

Notice of public hearings must be published in a local newspaper of general circulation, in a non-legal section of the paper at least ten (10) days prior to the hearing date, but no more than 25 days prior to the meeting date. Each notice of a hearing shall include the time, date, place, and topics and procedures to be discussed.

## ACCESSIBILITY TO LOW AND MODERATE INCOME PERSONS

The public hearing procedures outlined herein are designed to promote participation by low and moderate income citizens, as well as residents of blighted neighborhoods and CDBG project areas in any public hearing(s).

Local officials may take additional steps to further promote participation by such groups, or to target program information to these persons should officials feel that such persons may otherwise be excluded or should additional action be deemed necessary.

Activities to promote additional participation may include: posting of notices in blighted neighborhoods and in places frequented by low and moderate income persons, and holding public hearings in low and moderate income neighborhoods or areas of existing or proposed CDBG project activities.

## ACCESSIBILITY TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The locations of all public hearings as described herein shall be made accessible to persons with disabilities. **Graham County** shall provide a sign language interpreter whenever the Citizen Participation Coordinator is notified in advance that one or more deaf persons will be in attendance.

**Graham County** shall provide a qualified reader whenever the Citizen Participation Coordinator is notified in advance that one or more visually impaired persons will be in attendance.

Additionally, the **Graham County** shall provide reasonable accommodations whenever the Citizen Participation Coordinator is notified in advance that one or more persons with mobility or developmental disabilities will be in attendance.

## **7. PROGRAM INFORMATION**

Citizens will be provided full access to CDBG program information during all phases of a CDBG project. Local officials of **Graham County** shall make reasonable effort to assure that CDBG program information is available to all citizens, especially those of low and moderate incomes and those residing in blighted or Limited English Proficiency neighborhoods and/or CDBG project areas.

To facilitate citizen access to CDBG program information, the Citizen Participation Coordinator will keep all documents related to a CDBG program on file in the Town Hall. Information from the project files shall be made available for examination and duplication, on request, during regular business hours. CDBG program information and materials, concerning specific CDBG projects will be available and distributed to the public at the regularly scheduled public hearings as outlined in this Plan. Furthermore, information concerning any CDBG project will be available at regularly scheduled council meetings where the program is discussed.

Materials to be made available shall include, but are not necessarily limited to: the Citizen Participation Plan; records of public hearing; mailings and promotional materials; prior CDBG program applications; letters of approval; grant agreements; the environmental review record; financial and procurement records; project design and construction specifications; labor standards materials; performance and evaluation reports; other reports required by the State and/or HUD; proposed and approved CDBG program application(s) for the current year or project; written comments or complaints received

concerning the community development program, and written responses from **Graham County**; and, copies of the applicable Federal and State rules, regulations, policies, requirements and procedures governing the CDBG program.

In no case shall **Graham County** disclose any information concerning the financial status of any program participant(s) which may be required to document program eligibility or benefit. Furthermore, the **County** shall not disclose any information which may, in the opinion of the **Chief Elected Official**, be deemed of a confidential nature.

## **8. PROCEDURES FOR COMMENTS, OBJECTIONS AND COMPLAINTS**

The public hearings scheduled, as described in this Citizen Participation Plan, are designed to facilitate public participation in all phases of the community development process. Citizens are encouraged to submit their views and proposals on all aspects of a community development program at the public hearings. However, to ensure that citizens are given the opportunity to assess and comment on all aspects of the community development program on a continuous basis, citizens may, at any time, submit written comments or complaints to **Graham County**.

Any citizen or citizen's group desiring to comment or object to any phase of the planning, development or approval of the application for CDBG funds, or to the implementation of any CDBG program, should submit such comments or objections in writing to the **Chief Elected Official**. Should, after a reasonable period, a party believe that his/her comment or complaint has not been properly addressed or considered by the **Chief Elected Official**, then the aggrieved may appeal his/her case to the **County**.

Local officials shall make every effort to provide written responses to citizen proposals or complaints within fifteen (15) working days of the receipt of such comments or complaints where practicable. Should **Graham County** be unable to sufficiently resolve an objection or complaint, it may be forwarded by the aggrieved party to the State.

Citizens may, at any time, contact the NC Commerce, REDD and/or HUD directly to register comments, objections or complaints concerning the **County** CDBG application(s) and/or program(s). Citizens are encouraged, however, to attempt to resolve any complaints at the local level as outlined above prior to contacting the NC Commerce, REDD or HUD.

All comments or complaints submitted to the NC Commerce, REDD or the HUD shall be addressed in writing to:

NC Department of Commerce  
Rural Economic Development Division  
4346 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-4346

Or:

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
Community Planning and Development Division  
Greensboro Field Office  
1500 Pinecroft Road  
Greensboro, North Carolina 27407

Records of all comments, objections and/or complaints by citizens concerning **Graham County** CDBG program and subsequent action taken in response to those comments shall be maintained on file at **County** and shall be made available for public inspection upon request.

## **9. AMENDMENTS**

**Graham County** may, from time to time, modify the provisions outlined herein through amendment to this Citizen Participation Plan. It shall be the policy of the **County** to periodically review and discuss the effectiveness of this Citizen Participation Plan in allowing citizen participation in the community development process and in helping to meet the community development needs and goals identified by the citizens of the **County**. To this end, the effectiveness of the Plan will be discussed at public hearings held in conjunction with the community development program as discussed herein, and potential amendments to the Plan will be reviewed at this time.

Amendments to the Plan will be made as necessary.

## **10. AUTHORITY**

No portion of this Citizen Participation Plan shall be construed to restrict the responsibility and authority of the elected officials of **Graham County** in the development, implementation and execution of any Community Development Block Grant program.