

County of Mercer



For CDBG-CV Programs

Citizen Participation Plan (CPP)

MERCER COUNTY HOUSING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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COUNTY OF MERCER

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PLAN (CPP)

An element of the Consolidated Plan

In accordance with the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, as amended; 24 CFR, Part 570; and 24 CFR 91.105, and in furtherance of Mercer County's (hereinafter called County) commitment to facilitating the exchange of information between the County and its citizens, the County has established procedures to provide citizens with a reasonable opportunity to participate in the development of the Citizen Participation Plan (CPP), the Consolidated Plan, and the Comprehensive Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER).

The Mercer County Housing and Community Development Department (HCDD) will serve as the administering office for the County, with the administrative office being centrally located at 640 South Broad Street, Room 420, Trenton, Mercer County, NJ 08650. This CPP establishes the Citizen Participation standards for purposes for the County's Community Development Block Grant CARES Act (CDBG-CV) funds.

This CPP is prepared and implemented in accordance with the guidance provided in United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Regulations 24 CFR Part 91.105. Consortium members (the municipalities in Mercer County) who are CDBG entitlement communities shall also adopt and implement a CPP that complies with the requirements of 24 CFR Part 91.105.

The intent of the County is to especially encourage the participation of low- and moderate-income persons, particularly those living in slum and blighted areas or in areas where federal funds are proposed for use, and by residents of predominantly low- and moderate-income neighborhoods as defined by the County. Appropriate actions will also be taken to encourage participation by all citizens, including minorities, persons with Limited English Proficiency, and persons with disabilities. It is the County's intent to provide opportunities for meaningful involvement by low-income persons at all stages of the process, including:

- Needs Identification
- Priority Setting
- Funding Allocations
- Program Recommendations

The CPP must provide for and encourage citizen participation, emphasizing the involvement of low, very-low, and extremely low-income residents where housing and community development funds are spent. When preparing the Consolidated Plan, consultation is made with public and private agencies that provide housing, health, and social services, to include public housing authorities and assisted housing developments. Efforts are also made to local neighborhood groups, local and regional institutions and other organizations including businesses, developers, and community and faith-based groups. Consortium members are highly encouraged to participate in the process as well as established Community Housing Development organizations

(CHDO's) and adjacent county governments. Jurisdictions are expected to take whatever actions are appropriate to encourage the participation of all its residents, including minorities and non-English.

I. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION POLICIES

The County is committed to the goal of providing opportunities for citizens to review and comment on the Citizen Participation Plan, a public document, and any amendments to the Citizen Participation Plan. The following steps will be followed to meet this goal:

1. A public hearing to review the proposed Citizen Participation Plan will be held and copies of the proposed Plan will be made available at the public hearing, the County's Mercer County Housing and Community Development Department Office and its website, and at the Mercer County Public Library in Lawrence, Mercer County, NJ.
2. Notice of public hearings will be provided in newspapers of general circulation at least 14 days prior to the date of the hearing. Notices will also be placed on the County's web-site at <https://www.mercercounty.org/departments/housing-community-development>, on local information-sharing community networks and calendars, in neighborhood centers, and by placing a copy in the County's HCDD Office, and Mercer County Public Library. Local agencies that provide services to low-moderate income citizens will also be encouraged to provide citizen comment and review of the proposed Citizen Participation Plan.
3. Public hearings will be held at times and locations convenient to potential and actual beneficiaries, and with accommodations for persons with disabilities. Public hearings will be held at both night and daytime hours to accommodate working citizens.
4. Residents residing in assisted housing developments and low-income residents of targeted revitalization areas will be encouraged to provide citizen comment and review of the proposed Citizen Participation Plan.
5. The final Citizen Participation Plan will be available for citizen review by placing a copy in the HCDD Office, on the Mercer County Housing & Community Development Website and the Mercer County Public Library in Lawrence, Mercer County, NJ. Upon request, the Plan will be prepared in a format accessible to persons with disabilities and in a manner in compliance with the NJ Open Public Records Act.
6. Any proposed amendment to the Citizen Participation Plan will be published in newspapers of general circulation and will include a 14-day comment period for citizen input prior to approval by the County's governing body. The amended Plan will be available for citizen review by placing a copy in the HCDD Office and the

Mercer County Public Library in Lawrence, NJ and on the Mercer County Housing & Community Development website.

7. All public hearings will be held in facilities that are wheelchair accessible and provide handicapped parking. Interpretive services for deaf or citizens with Limited English Proficiency will be available with an advance notice of 48 hours. Arrangements for such services can be made by calling the Mercer County HCDD at 609-989-6858.

II. CONSOLIDATED PLAN

The County is committed to providing citizens with the opportunity to participate in the development of the Consolidated Plan, annual updates, substantial amendments to the Consolidated Plan, and the CAPER. To accomplish this goal, the following procedures will be utilized:

A. Public Comments and Input

1. The County will hold a minimum of two public hearings in a centrally located area(s) easily accessible by public transit and located throughout the HOME Consortium area each year to be conducted at two different stages of the program year in order to solicit citizen input and comments on housing and non-housing community development needs. Efforts will be made to conduct a public hearing in neighborhoods and areas that potentially may benefit from the funds.

The first hearing will provide information regarding the amount of assistance the County expects to receive (including anticipated program income) for the next fiscal year, the range of activities that are expected to be undertaken, the estimated amount of the anticipated funds that will be utilized to benefit low-moderate income persons, the County's policy on minimizing displacement of any person, and the types and levels of assistance available to persons displaced by the use of CDBG funds.

The second hearing will be utilized to discuss any comments received regarding the proposed Consolidated Plan, any changes to the proposed Plan, and to provide a review of program performance.

2. Notice of public hearings will be provided in newspapers of general circulation at least 14 days prior to the date of the hearing. Notices will also be placed on the County's web-site at <https://www.mercercounty.org/departments/housing-community-development>, on local information-sharing community networks and calendars, in neighborhood centers, and by placing a copy in the County's HCDD Office, the Mercer County Housing & Community Development website and Mercer County Public Library. Local agencies that provide services to low-

moderate income citizens will also be encouraged to provide citizen comment and review of the proposed Citizen Participation Plan.

3. Residents of assisted housing developments and low-income residents of targeted revitalization areas will be encouraged to participate in the development and review of the Consolidated Plan by holding the public hearings in targeted areas that allow easy access by low-income citizens and through the use of special outreach programs to be determined by the County.
4. A summary of the Consolidated Plan will be published in a newspaper of general circulation (Trenton Times or Trentonian) and a press release will be submitted to the newspaper. The summary will also be posted to the County's website. The summary will provide a brief description of the purpose and contents of the proposed Consolidated Plan and will provide the locations where copies of the entire draft Consolidated Plan may be reviewed by citizens prior to the approval of the governing body of the County.
5. A 30-day comment period will be allowed for citizens to comment on the proposed Consolidated Plan, excluding amendments required by HUD which do not require the usual public process or for which abbreviated or specific standards are provided. All citizen input and comments received in writing or orally at the public hearings will be considered in preparing the final Consolidated Plan. A summary of these comments or views, and a summary of any comments or views not accepted and the reason therefore, shall be attached to the final Consolidated Plan.

B. Comprehensive Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER)

1. A 15-day comment period will be allowed for citizens to comment on the Comprehensive Annual Performance and Evaluation Report, which is due to HUD within 90 days of the close of the program year, prior to its submission to HUD. At a minimum, a copy of the CAPER will be made available for citizen review by placing a copy in the County's HCDD Office and Mercer County Public Library in Lawrence, NJ and the Mercer County Housing & Community Development website. Copies of the CAPER will be made available to the public upon request.
2. A summary of all comments or views of citizens received in writing or orally at any public hearings will be attached to the final CAPER.

C. Amendments to the Consolidated Plan

1. Amendments are required when there will be a substantial change in the purpose, scope, location, or beneficiaries of a project, per federal requirements. Amendments require notice to the public and an opportunity for citizen comment.

2. Amendments will be completed when the County makes the following decisions:
 - a. To make a change in allocation priorities or a change in the method of distribution of funds occurs; or
 - b. To carry out an activity not previously described in the Action Plan using funds from any program covered by the Consolidated Plan, including program income; or
 - c. To change the purpose, scope, location, or beneficiaries of an activity.
3. Substantial change is further defined locally by the County to include circumstances when an individual budget transfer of more than 25% of the County's total annual federal allocation reported in the Consolidated Plan, plus program income received in the prior fiscal year, is directed to a different project than originally allocated in the Consolidated Plan.
4. Amendments to the Consolidated Plan will be published in a newspaper of general circulation (Trenton Times or Trentonian). The amended Plan will be available at the County's HCDD Office and Mercer County Public Library in Lawrence, NJ and Housing & Community Development website.
5. Citizens will be given a 30-day period to comment on any substantial amendment to the Consolidated Plan prior to the implementation of the amendment. All comments of citizens will be considered and a summary of comments or views not accepted and the reasons therefore, will be attached to the amended Consolidated Plan.
6. A copy of each amendment will be provided to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development under a cover letter signed by an authorized person as designated by the County Board, either as it occurs or at the end of the program year.

D. Technical Assistance, Accessibility to Hearings and Records, Written Responses, and Complaint Procedures

1. Technical assistance will be provided to groups representative of persons of low-moderate income that request such assistance in developing proposals for funding assistance that are consistent with the goals and priorities in the Consolidated Plan. The level and type of assistance will be determined by the County on a case-by-case basis and may consider issues such as availability and capacity of staff and complexity of project.
2. All public hearings will be held in facilities that are wheelchair accessible and provide handicapped parking. Interpretive services for deaf or citizens with Limited English Proficiency will be available with an advance notice of 48 hours.

Arrangements for such services can be made by calling the County of Mercer County HCCD Department at 609-989-6858.

3. The County will provide citizens, public agencies, and other interested parties with reasonable and timely access to information and records relating to the Consolidated Plan and the use of assistance under the programs covered by the Plan during the preceding five (5) years. Upon request, the Plan will be prepared in a format accessible to persons with disabilities and in a manner in compliance with the NJ Open Public Records Act.
4. The County will provide timely, substantive written response to the respective citizen regarding every written citizen comment (comments must contain name and mailing address) related to the Consolidated Plan, amendments, and the Annual Performance Report within fifteen (15) working days where practical.
5. Complaints and grievances related to the Consolidated Plan, amendments, and CAPER should be submitted in writing to the Mercer County Housing and Community Development Department, P. O. Box 8068, (640 South Broad Street, Room 420), Trenton, Mercer County, NJ 08650. Written complaints that provide a name and address will receive a written response within fifteen (15) days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

III. DISPLACEMENT INTERVENTION

Procedures for Displacement Intervention have also been developed for residents displaced due to demolition or conversion activities. The County is committed to the principle that persons of similar economic levels should have available to them like range of housing choices and has therefore, developed an Affirmative Marketing Policy that is applicable to all sponsored programs, projects, and activities. This policy sets forth actions that will be taken to achieve affirmative marketing of units produced or rehabilitated through funding contained in the County's Consolidated Plan.

A. Anti-Displacement Policy

1. The County will actively seek to minimize displacement and does not anticipate any displacement of citizens resulting from programs covered by the Consolidated Plan and will take an active role in preventing such displacement by:
 - a. Thoroughly analyzing projects on a case-by-case basis to determine if any displacement might occur in connection with an individual project.
 - b. Seeking alternatives that could achieve the public purpose without displacement.

- c. Advising non-resident owners of their responsibilities and potential costs involved with projects resulting in displacement.
2. All persons expected to be affected by relocation provisions will be contacted via certified and regular mail, return receipt requested. This notice will be provided immediately upon the receipt of project application and will provide all information regarding relocation rights and the County's obligations as required by federal regulations.
3. The County will also provide counseling and information regarding comparable replacement dwellings, individual rights under the Fair Housing Law, and how to search suitable replacement housing.

B. Relocation Benefits

1. In the event that displacement does occur from programs, projects, or activities covered by the Consolidated Plan, relocation benefits will be provided to displaced individuals as required by the Uniform Relocation and Real Property Acquisition Act of 1970 and 24 CFR 570.104(d), as amended and where applicable. The County and all Subrecipients or contractors involved in these programs and activities will be committed and obligated to provide appropriate levels of relocation assistance when needed.
2. If temporary relocation is required to carry out rehabilitation or other federally funded activities, the owner/tenant will be entitled to select from two options in reference to moving expenses:
 - a. Reimbursement for all reasonable out-of-pocket expenses, including any increase in monthly housing costs (mortgage, rent, and estimated utility costs), insurance coverage on goods during the move, disconnecting and reconnecting household appliances, transportation costs within fifty (50) miles of the original dwelling, and storage of household goods incurred in the move. Consideration for reimbursement will be made based on clear and verified receipts, indicating amounts and date paid. The County will provide the final determination as to the reasonableness of verified moving expenses.
 - b. Fixed moving expense payment, which is an allowance based on the number of rooms of furniture the tenant will move, and in conformance with the most recently published schedule for "Fixed Moving Expenses and Dislocation Allowance" from the U. S. Department of Transportation. The County will require verification or a certified statement regarding the number of rooms and furniture involved. The temporary housing that is provided will be decent, safe, and sanitary, as determined by the County.
3. Tenants who are permanently displaced, with income not exceeding the very-low income limit (50% of median income, adjusted for family size), will be

offered assistance through the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program, (dependent upon the availability of voucher assistance).

4. Cash Assistance, which may be utilized for rent or purchase of a replacement dwelling, for permanently displaced tenants will be offered to:
 - a. Tenants with income below 50% of median, certified to receive a Housing Voucher through the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program, but unable to locate a dwelling unit in which the owner will agree to participate in the Section 8 Program.
 - b. Tenants ineligible for Section 8 assistance because their income exceeds the eligibility limits.

C. Replacement Housing for Demolished or Converted Units

1. The County will replace all occupied and vacant occupiable low-moderate income dwelling units demolished or converted to a use other than low-moderate income housing in connection with a program or an activity covered by the Consolidated Plan. The condition and determination of “occupiable unit” will be determined through inspection of the unit, and a written statement by a building official or inspector. The condition of the structure will be documented on an inspection log and with photographs. All replacement housing will be provided within the timeframes as specified by federal regulation.
2. At least 14 days prior to entering into a contract committing funds to an activity that will directly result in demolition or conversion, the County will provide public notice in the newspaper of general circulation located in the County in which the activity is occurring, with the following information:
 - a. A description of the proposed activity;
 - b. The location on a map and the number of dwelling units by size (number of bedrooms) that will be demolished or converted to a use other than low-moderate income housing,
 - c. A time schedule for the commencement and completion of the activity;
 - d. The location on a map and the number of dwellings units by size (number of bedrooms) that will be provided as replacement dwellings, if that information is available. If such data is not available, the County will identify the general location on an area map, by number and size, and provide specific information as soon as it is available.
 - e. The source of the funding and a time schedule for the provision of the replacement units;
 - f. The basis for concluding that each replacement dwelling unit will remain a low-moderate income dwelling unit for at least 10 years from the date of initial occupancy;
 - g. Information demonstrating that any proposed replacement of dwelling units with smaller dwelling units (i.e., a 2-bedroom unit replaced with 2 1-

bedroom units) is consistent with the identified housing needs of lower-income households in the County.

IV. AFFIRMATIVE MARKETING POLICY

The County adheres to the principle that persons of similar economic levels should have available to them like range of housing choices, regardless of their race, color, religion, sex, age, handicap, national origin, or familial status. This policy sets forth actions that will be taken to achieve affirmative marketing of units produced or rehabilitated through funding contained in the Consolidated Plan.

A. Actions by Participating Owners/Landlords/Builders/Developers

1. List rehabilitated or constructed units, or advertise them through, as large a number of referral sources as practical to attract a wide cross-section of lower-income tenant/homebuyer prospects. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - a. Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Programs located within the region;
 - b. Low income housing developments located in the County and in the neighborhood in which the activity occurs;
 - c. Affordable Housing Programs administered or provided by neighboring governmental entities, community organizations, and for-profit organizations;
 - d. Private tenant placement offices and real estate firms;
 - e. Local newspapers of general circulation.
2. Develop community contacts through which persons who are not likely to apply for the housing without special outreach, might be attracted.
3. Inform the County of vacancies or completion of construction as they occur, steps being taken consistent with those listed in #1 and #2 above, and characteristics of occupants once units are occupied.
4. Use Equal Housing Opportunity logo on printed materials and display Fair Housing posters in all public places and offices.
5. Maintain records documenting efforts to achieve affirmative marketing.

B. Actions by the County

1. Inform the public, potential tenants, homeowners, and homebuyers about Fair Housing Laws and elements of this policy through the following methods:
 - a. Information presented through the media.
 - b. Dissemination of printed material to tenants and owners.

- c. Individual counseling provided to prospective tenants, homeowners, and homebuyers.
2. Promote the achievement of affirmative marketing goals through interaction with other housing service providers and advocates in the region.
3. Maintain records documenting efforts by the County and others to achieve affirmative marketing.

C. Assessment and Corrective Actions

1. The County will assess the effectiveness and compliance efforts of participating owners, landlords, builders, and developers on a regular basis, and on a special basis as needed.
2. This assessment will include, at a minimum, the comparison of characteristics of occupants in assisted activities with characteristics of the County as a whole.
3. Participants suspected to be in non-compliance or in violation of this policy shall be reviewed by the County for determination of violation, and issuance of penalties and/or forfeiture and/or repayment of funding.