

Planning and Community Development Director Craig Raymond requested that the Commission conduct a public hearing regarding this year's Annual Action Plan for allocation of 2017/2018 CDBG and HOME funding. The Annual Action Plan is essentially what the City plans on funding with the CDBG allocation for the coming year. This year the City of Great Falls is expected to receive \$710,110 in federal CDBG funds. The Annual Action Plan is specific as to what projects the Community Development Council recommends the City Commission approve funding for. Staff requests that the City Commission take final action on the Annual Action Plan on June 6, 2017, after the 30-day comment period has expired. The request this evening is simply to conduct the public hearing and for the Commission to take into consideration public comments.

As required, public hearing notices were published in the Great Falls Tribune on April 30th, May 2nd, and May 6th, 2017. Specific funding recommendations were outlined in detail at the City Commission meeting held on April 18th, 2017. The City Commission accepted those recommendations and scheduled this public hearing on May 16, 2017.

Mayor Kelly declared the public hearing open.

Brett Doney, Great Falls Development Authority, 300 Central Avenue, commented that 15 years ago Great Falls' average annual wage was 67% of the national average. The last quarter of 2016 it reached 75% of the national average and, at the same time, the cost of living was kept below the national average. He expressed appreciation for the support of economic development.

Shyla Patera, North Central Independent Living, residing at 1013 7th Avenue NW, encouraged support for Public Works and Housing applicants taking into account accessibility.

Heidi Gibson, Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art, residing at 25 Watson Lane, spoke in support of CDBG funding for the ADA restroom upgrade at the Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art. The last restroom upgrade was done 19 years ago.

Sheila Rice, NeighborWorks Great Falls, residing at 913 3rd Avenue North, spoke in support of the housing component within the Community Development and HOME Action Plan. It is essential to the work NeighborWorks does for the community.

Nancy Zadick, 1901 Whispering Ridge Drive, spoke in support of the CDBG grant award to Paris Gibson Square. She supports accessibility to the arts education that the Square provides. She also noted that she has been a board member of Paris Gibson Square for about 10 years.

Ron Gessaman, 1006 36th Avenue NE, expressed disappointment that the Great Falls Senior Citizens Center did not receive an allocation.

Director Raymond responded that the Senior Center received an allocation during the timeliness funding process.

Kevin Mursewski, 2820 7th Avenue North, commented that it was his understanding that, of the \$98 million dollars voted on by the voters for Great Falls Public Schools, \$3.4 million dollars was going to Paris Gibson Square as part of an infrastructure project.

Commissioner Houck explained that the non-profit she is Executive Director for is named Paris Gibson Square located on 1st Avenue North. The Great Falls Public Schools opened a new school on Central Avenue called Paris Gibson Education Center. They are not the same facility. The \$3 million dollar investment will take place at 2400 Central Avenue under the management of the Great Falls Public Schools.

Written correspondence in support of CDBG funding for Paris Gibson Square was received from Heidi Gibson, B.J. Buckley and Kristi Scott.

Mayor Kelly closed the public hearing, and asked the will of the Commission.

Commissioner Jones moved, seconded by Commissioner Bronson, that the City Commission schedule final action on the 2017/2018 Annual Action Plan for June 6, 2017.

Mayor Kelly asked if there was any discussion amongst the Commissioners. Hearing none, Mayor Kelly called for the vote.

Motion carried 4-0-1 (Commissioner Houck abstained).

Submitted Comments

In addition to the public hearing, the attached written comments were submitted.

City of
Great Falls
MONTANA

Check the Status of Your Ticket

Ticket ID

21315011

Update Ticket/Add Comment

Apply

CDGB Funding for Wheelchair-Accessible Restroom at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art

Status: Closed

Email: bjbuckley@earthlink.net

Assigned To: Ikunz (City Commission)

Name: B. J. Buckley

Ticket ID: 21315011

Phone Number: 406-467-2986

Dear Commissioners:

I am writing in favor of approving CDGB funding for a handicapped and wheelchair-accessible restroom in the lower level Education Department at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art. For the past several years I have been an art instructor at PGSMOA, teaching VSA Adult Multi-Media Art, Senior Citizen Paper Arts, and a number of preschool and grade school art classes. I have also conducted tours and workshops for visually and hearing-impaired students from the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind; clients of the Center for Mental Health; and visiting school groups from both within and outside the Great Falls School District. A significant number of my VSA students have cognitive as well as physical disabilities, and in every class I have taught I have had had students in wheelchairs and/or walkers. Since Montana Schools have inclusive classrooms, visiting groups often have students in wheelchairs as part of their groups.

The current lower-level toilets are quite old, and lower to the ground than modern standard, creating difficulty for senior citizens as well as those with physical handicaps; the stalls are too narrow to permit wheelchair access, as well as too narrow for a safe turning radius for those who use walkers. My VSA students are not always able to give adequate advance notice of their sanitary needs to allow their aides to get them down the hall, into the elevator to the first floor, down the hall again, and into the accessible first-floor restrooms in time. I am a former CNA, and have on several occasions assisted aides in getting students out of their chairs and into the downstairs toilet in situations where immediate toilet needs cannot be ignored. The accidents that have inevitably occurred necessitate the students return to their facility where they can be helped with cleaning themselves, and get clean clothes, missing the remainder of a class that validates their many talents and abilities. Whether children or adults, any accidents leave these most vulnerable people feeling upset and humiliated, despite reassurance from aides, myself, and their fellow students that "It's okay, accidents happen."

CDBG funding for an accessible restroom on the Education Level -- the most high-traffic area of the museum -- means such accidents and humiliations never have to happen again; and if despite everything they do, it would provide space and facilities for cleaning up with privacy and dignity, on site, and in a relatively short period of time, so that the student could return to the class and continue their activity. Needless to say, preschool, grade school, and senior citizen students also occasionally have immediate personal sanitary needs; a close accessible restroom would allow them to avoid accidents and have the same privacy and dignity. I sincerely hope that in considering this application, you will agree with me that politics has absolutely no place here; this request for funding is entirely about the wonderful and vibrant people who take my classes having the same safe restroom access as you or I do at the museum, everywhere we go. I ask for your "Yes" vote approving funding.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider my comments.
Sincerely, B.J. Buckley, Instructor, VSA / Seniors/ Children at PGSMOA

Ticket History



Closed

Updated By: Ikunz

Assigned To: Ikunz (City Commission)

Hi B.J. - thank you for using this ticketing system to communicate with the Commission. Your comments have been forwarded, and hard copies will be provided, to the City Commission and appropriate City staff for consideration at tonight's Commission meeting on Agenda Item 12.

Lisa Kunz, City Clerk

Open

Updated By: Ikunz

Assigned To: Ikunz (City Commission)

Good Morning B.J. - your comments have been shared with the City Commission and appropriate City staff for consideration. Thank you for submitting your comments via this ticket system to correspond with the City Commission.

Lisa Kunz, City Clerk

05/15/2017 - 8:41am

New

Assigned To:

Citizen request/question created.

05/11/2017 - 4:55pm

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a municodeWEB design

Maria Porter

From: Connie Tryon
Sent: Monday, May 15, 2017 8:57 AM
To: Lisa C. Kunz; Maria Porter
Subject: FW: New Ticket: 21619560 - CDBG Funding

Hi ladies,

Received this on Friday. Forwarding to you for your files. I have another one I will be sending, but it looks like a duplicate with a different ticket number. I will respond on the web saying I have forwarded this to appropriate staff so that they may print it and give to the Commissioners.

Let me know if you need me to do or say anything different.

Thanks!

Connie Tryon

Sr. Administrative Assistant
City of Great Falls
Planning and Community Development
(406) 455-8438
ctryon@greatfallsmt.net

From: Web Master
Sent: Friday, May 12, 2017 2:29 PM
To: Connie Tryon
Subject: New Ticket: 21619560 - CDBG Funding

Ticket ID: 21619560

Ticket Node ID: 145701

Ticket Topic: CDBG Funding

Department: Planning and Community Development

Department default assignee: ctryon

Details:

Dear Commissioners:

I am writing in favor of Paris Gibson Square's proposal for CDGB funding for a much needed handicapped and wheelchair-accessible restroom in the Education Department in the basement of our public building. The Education Department caters to classes designed for the young and old, the able bodied and also those in wheel chairs and other mobility assisting implements. Currently the aging toilet is very small, low to the ground and inefficient in the

basement. The stall door to the single toilet on the entire floor, is very narrow; denying access for those in wheelchairs and restricting movement for those that rely on walkers. In order to use a handicap accessible restroom patrons have to traverse the long hallway from the east to the west end of the building, take the elevator up one floor and then traverse the 2nd floor hallway again to the bathroom at the very east end!

Funding for a bathroom on the lower level of The Square, where all of our classrooms are, warrants CDGB support. I am the Curator of Art for The Square and know first-hand how important it is to allow for access and basic comforts to our visitors with special needs. In exhibitions I accommodate a diverse audience by having larger print font available, hanging art at a medium of 56", a height that allows adults, small children and those in wheel chairs alike the access to participate through experience. An accessible restroom is fundamental for all patrons that visit or attend classes at The Square. Further, our organization houses a Very Special Arts (VSA) program that partners with Easter Seals-Good Will and local retirement communities to offer student with special considerations an opportunity to take art classes. Some of these VSA students are in wheelchairs and attend classes in our public building on a weekly basis. It is critical that we offer a convenient restroom for these mobility impaired visitors in our low to moderate income area and I ask that you move forward with supporting this important project.

Sincerely,
Kristi Scott

Please do not respond to this email. To update the ticket or respond to the citizen use the link below.

https://greatfallsmt.net//ticket_status?id=21619560

City of
Great Falls
MONTANA

Check the Status of Your Ticket

Ticket ID

22011ac8

Update Ticket/Add Comment

Apply

CDBG testimony

Status: Closed

Email: dev@the-square.org

Assigned To: lkunz (City Commission)

Name: Heidi Gibson

Ticket ID: 22011ac8

Phone Number: 4067278255

My name is Heidi Gibson, and I am writing in support for Paris Gibson Square's request for CDBG funding. The restroom needing ADA accessibility upgrades is located in the Education Department on the lower level. This restroom is used by the most visitors on a daily basis, yet it is not accessible by wheelchair. The Square's motto is "Art is for Everyone," yet the restroom accessibility issue makes it difficult for those with physical limitations, many of which are enrolled in the Vision, Strength, Access, formerly known as the Very Special Arts (VSA) program. Last year, the number of participants almost doubled with a total of 452 students. The next Picasso could be the hands of a person in a wheelchair wearing a helmet. If we do not provide appropriate access for this person, we may never know the talents that lie inside. I have seen talented artists without hands who paint with their feet or their teeth. If we can make art education available to all, we can help cultivate the talents of all people, not just the ones who can make the best of the facility as it was built in 1895 during a time when people with

disabilities were often sent away to large government funded institutions. Art therapy is one of the many ways that human services programs help people develop their talents.

Previous projects funded by CDBG dollars include the following:

2014-15 ADA Accessibility Building Improvement \$8,300.00

2011-12 Education Department Supplies & Equipment \$4,150.00

2010-11 Art is for Everyone – VSA Montana \$3,500.00

2007-08 Art is for Everyone – VSA Montana \$14,382.23

1997-98 Restroom Renovation – ADA Improvements \$18,368.00

1981-82 Electronic Control for Boiler Ignition System \$2,000.00

1977-78 Parking lot, curbs, walkways and exterior cleaning \$15,000.00

I am very grateful to see a history of funding for the arts in our community, particular for this very special program called VSA. I am grateful to live in a community that supports the arts, for when I visit other communities where artists thrive ... it is usually the reflection of a thriving community. Let's encourage our up and coming artists so we may all thrive.

Ticket History

Closed

Updated By: lkunz

Assigned To: lkunz (City Commission)

Hi Heidi - thank you for using this ticketing system to communicate with the Commission. Your comments have been forwarded, and hard copies will be provided, to the City Commission and appropriate City staff for consideration at tonight's Commission meeting on Agenda Item 12.

Lisa Kunz, City Clerk

05/16/2017 - 10:56am

New

Assigned To:

Citizen request/question created.

05/16/2017 - 9:14am

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Comment on 2017-18 Community Development Block Grant allocations for City of Great Falls

To: CDBG Administrator Maria Porter
Planning & Community Development
City of Great Falls MT

May 24, 2017

Great Falls city commissioner Tracy Houck has been a city commissioner since January 2016. She is also the paid executive director of the Paris Gibson Square Museum (PGS). PGS is a non-profit organization that regularly applies for Community Development Block Grant funds and so Commissioner Houck is aware of the allocation process and the city's Community Development Council.

It was not until Paris Gibson Square Museum was not recommended to receive any Public Facilities funds in the CDC process of selecting applicants for Community Development Block Grant funds for 2017-18 that suddenly Commissioner Houck revealed a conflict with a member of the Council and intervened in the allocation process. It appears that she was acting both as city commissioner and also as executive director of PGS when she intervened. Subsequently, per the City's review of the matter, the CDC reconvened, went through the process again of scoring organizations for allocation dollars, and PGS was recommended to receive money.

The appearance of a conflict of interest to the public is obvious in this situation. Additionally, Houck publicly commented as both a city commissioner and a representative of the PGS in a work session of the city commission on March 20, 2017:

"I was one of the ones that was very concerned about the process, some of it as a city commissioner but somebody also who represents the public nonprofits in the community....The organization I work with had an environmental review that was not addressed."

After the Director of Planning and Community Development questioned her on that comment, Commissioner Houck stated that, "The Square had a Brownfields grant done."

Commissioner Houck should have recused herself from that part of the discussion about CDBG funding allocations due to her conflict of interest as executive director of PGS.

Due to Commissioner Houck's conflicts of interest in being both executive director of PGS and a city commissioner, and also due to the fact that she intervened in the CDC process only after PGS was not recommended for any CDBG Public Facilities allocation dollars, I believe PGS should be denied funding in 2017-18 under the CDBG Public Facilities allocations.

I am also of the opinion that city commissioner Bill Bronson should abstain/recuse himself for voting on any CDBG/HOME funds being allocated to NeighborWorks Great Falls because his wife is an employee of that organization. Additionally, his son works for Paris Gibson Square Museum and he should abstain/recuse himself from voting on any funding for that organization. In my understanding, HUD

suggests that any real or apparent conflict of interest exists when a representative of the city has an immediate family member employed in an organization that is applying for CDBG/HOME funds (24 C.F.R. Part 84 and 85 – HUD document, Conflicts of Interest CDBG and HOME Programs).

Members of the public in the past have gone on record to suggest Commissioner Bronson recuse himself or abstain from voting on funding for NWGF for that very reason, but he openly states he does not need to do so (example: City Commission minutes Jan. 20, 2016).

Phyllis Tryon
2709 1st Ave N
Great Falls MT 59401

May 29, 2017

Public Comment on the proposed Community Development Block Grant funding allocations and Annual Action Plan for 2017-18

To: CDBG Administrator Maria Porter
Planning & Community Development
City of Great Falls, MT

Regarding the upcoming Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding allocations and acceptance of the Annual Action Plan vote before the Great Falls city commission on June 6, 2017, Commissioner Bill Bronson should recuse himself or abstain from voting on any item involving any organization in which members of his immediate family work.

It seems that HUD regulations indicate that a person in the position of city commissioner who has immediate family members working in organizations that request CDBG/HOME funds should abstain from voting or recuse themselves due to either real or apparent conflicts of interest (24 C.F.R. Part 84 and 85 – HUD document, Conflicts of Interest CDBG and HOME Programs). Any reasonable person would follow HUD rules on this matter.

Commissioner Bronson has immediate family members that are paid employees of NeighborWorks Great Falls and Paris Gibson Square Museum, both of which are recommended to receive CDBG/HOME funds for 2017-18.

In addition, because of Commissioner Tracy Houck's dual roles as a city commissioner and as the paid executive director of Paris Gibson Square Museum, the PGS Museum should forego any CDBG funding under the Public Facilities portion of the program for 2017-18. It appears that Commissioner Houck leveraged her position as a city commissioner to effect a Community Development Council do-over on the scoring for Public Facilities, for which she received a written reprimand from the city attorney for conflict of interest. PGS Museum had not been recommended by the CDC to receive any funds until after Houck intervened and the CDC was reconvened and began the scoring process over.

Furthermore, Commissioner Houck has an immediate family member who is also a paid employee of the PGS Museum.

I wonder if either Commissioner Houck or Commissioner Bronson have disclosed in writing to HUD their potential conflicts of interest in this matter, as HUD requires.

Rick Tryon
2709 1st Ave North
Great Falls MT 59401

Maria Porter

From: Maria Porter
Sent: Thursday, June 01, 2017 10:48 AM
To: 'Sharon Odden'
Subject: RE: CDBG

Good Morning Sharon,

After reviewing our Public Comment packet, I realized that I did not include the 2nd procedural error that initiated the reconvening of the CDC for the CDBG Public Facility Applicants. The 2nd procedural error was that a public citizen participated in the CDC discussion regarding the applications. I apologize for not including this in my response below. Please let me know if you have any further questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Maria Porter, CPS
CDBG/HOME Administrator
Planning & Community Development
City of Great Falls
406-455-8407

From: Maria Porter
Sent: Thursday, May 18, 2017 3:40 PM
To: 'Sharon Odden'
Subject: RE: CDBG

Good Afternoon Sharon,

Thank you for reaching out to me and sharing your concerns. I hope I am able to shed some light on the situation to help address your questions.

I did not notify the applicants if they were awarded because it was not yet approved by the City Commission. Until it is approved at a City Commission meeting, the funding allocations may change. The CDC meetings and recommendations are public knowledge, therefore as you request the information I am happy to share it with you.

We completely understand your frustrations with the process this year but please know that your time was not wasted, all Public Facility applicants were asked to return to present a 2nd time to the CDC. All Public Facility applicants had an equal chance of being funded. The CDC reconvened with a blank slate for the Public Facility allocation. The CDC was instructed to score solely on the 2nd Presentation with no information shared to give any particular Public Facility applicant an unfair advantage.

The procedural conflict was an alleged conflict of interest for one of the CDC members. It was requested to remove their input in the process of Public Facility allocations. This led to the City Manager's office requesting to reconvene the CDC and all Public Facility applicants to redo the process with the removal of the CDC member.

Thank you for your time and please let me know if you have any further questions or concerns. Although the City Commission already held the public hearing for the CDBG process, they will take final action on June 6th and you are always free to come and express your feelings at any time to the City Commission. We encourage you to do so.

Sincerely,

Maria Porter, CPS
CDBG/HOME Administrator
Planning & Community Development
City of Great Falls
406-455-8407

From: Sharon Odden [<mailto:sharon@familypromisegf.org>]
Sent: Tuesday, May 16, 2017 2:32 PM
To: Maria Porter
Subject: CDBG

Good Afternoon, Maria,

I have been stewing about this issue for quite some time and decided that the best way to deal with it is to let you know about my concern.

A while back nine of the applicants for CDBG funding were asked to return to deliver our oral presentations again on the basis of a procedural error. This gave me, and I am sure others, hope that we may be successful on our second try. I never have heard from anyone about our success or lack of success either time.

Now I understand that we were called back because a City Commissioner who also leads a nonprofit had complained about not being funded. So some us returned to present and her organization was granted \$25,000. I'm thinking that we had no chance of getting any approved in the first place. We had our hopes raised and our time was wasted.

I too had serious questions about why we were not funded and I think the reasons I was given were weak. But I certainly respected the decision and did not make a fuss.

So now I am wondering, what was the procedural error was made that brought us back to present? On what basis did you determine who would represent?

Thank you for hearing me out, Maria! And thank you for the information about the HOME program that could help many homeless folks in our community!

Sincerely,

Sharon

Sharon Odden, M.Ed., L.P.A.

Executive Director

Family Promise of Great Falls

P.O. Box 455

1019 Central Avenue

Great Falls, MT 59403

sharon@familypromisegf.org

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