

**FITCHBURG PLANNING BOARD PUBLIC HEARING
YEAR 49 CDBG PROGRAM APPLICANTS
MINUTES**

THURSDAY, JANUARY 12, 2023

FITCHBURG CITY CLERK

Feb 01 2023 4:19 pm

In Attendance:

PLANNING BOARD MEMBERS

Paula Caron, Chair
Tracy McGrath
Alex Lopez

COMMUNITY DEV/PLANNING STAFF

Liz Murphy
Kimberly LeBlanc
Mike O'Hara
Mary Jo Bohart
Herlin Jaime

The meeting was held in the Legislative Building but there were attendees that were hybrid.

Paula Caron opened the meeting at 6:00 p.m. Paula explained the purpose of the CDBG hearing and the upcoming schedule. Paula requested that Mike O'Hara monitor the chat function in order to address questions, and requested that those wishing to speak virtually use the "raise hand" function.

Thirty-four (34) CDBG proposals were received totaling \$1,908,433 in requests. Approximately \$956,587.00 in Year 49 funds is estimated to be available. The CDBG schedule was explained to the audience. The schedule is as follows: The Planning Board will meet on January 24th to discuss the Year 49 proposals. We will then submit our recommendations for funding to Mayor DiNatale. The Mayor will review our funding recommendations and submit his recommendations to the City Council. The City Council will review CDBG recommendations beginning on February 21st, the City Council's Finance Committee will make their recommendations February 22nd, and the full City Council will vote on March 7th. The proposed consolidated plan and statement of CDBG activities will be published on March 22nd, 2022. Public comments will be received up to the date of the second public hearing which is scheduled for April 25th. We anticipate local approval of Year 49 consolidated plan and CDBG action plan in May, at which time the City's Year 49 application will be submitted to HUD for approval. The program year officially begins on July 1st, 2023.

Liz Murphy, Executive Director of Community Development, referred applicants to the handouts provided in the application package that were also available at the meeting. The CDBG Program regulations were outlined. In order for a project to be eligible it must meet one of the three national objectives which include: benefitting persons of low-moderate income, eliminating slums and blight, or meeting an urgent need. Eligible activities include: public facilities, public services, demolition, economic development, rehab & preservation, planning & administration. For projects serving a low-moderate income area, at least 51% of the households must be at 80% median income or less. There is a 20% cap on planning and admin activities, and a 15% cap on public service activities. It is the City's responsibility to insure that at least 70% of CDBG funds are used to benefit low-moderate income persons over a three-year period. Liz thanked Herlin Jaime from Community Development for providing Spanish translation services.

Paula Caron explained some housekeeping rules and welcomed comments from the audience.

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND IMPROVEMENTS

PROJECT – SPONSOR **YEAR 49 REQUEST – YEAR 48 AWARD**

City Park Signs Replacement and Updating – Parks & Recreation **Year 49 Request: \$12,000 – Year 48 Award: N/A**

The purpose of this project is to create uniformity and a consistent message throughout all of the parks regarding rules, regulations, general information, and contact information to create a culture and illustrate what is expected of the people who visit the parks, playgrounds, fields, etc.

James Bunnell, Recreation Director, spoke to this proposal. James is new to the City and the department and this is month number three. There are over 40 parks and playgrounds and several parks are lacking signage, signage has been damaged or vandalized, completely washed out, or faded and this is an important part of a park. He is trying to make people aware of the openings and closings and rules while using the park. He is requesting to update and make a consistent message throughout Fitchburg regarding all of the parks. He would like to include QR codes to link each park to the department's website for more information along with a phone number where citizens can call to report issues within the parks to help mitigate issues promptly.

Parks & Playgrounds – Community Development & Planning **Year 49 Request: \$75,000 – Year 48 Award: \$74,408**

This project will include the completion of the upgrades to Mama Fitz and Parkhill Park and provide necessary park designs and match to leverage grant funding to update outdated park features and meet the City's Open Space and Recreation Plan to upgrade old equipment and reuse existing parks to meet current recreational needs of the community.

Liz Murphy, Executive Director of Community Development, notes that we are seeking funding to finish work on Mama Fitz Park and Park Hill Park and replace playground equipment. Working with consultant and Parks Department, referring to our open space plan, plan for the next park improvement activity. Some of the funding would be used for planning as well as contingency funds for Mama Fitz and Park Hill Park. This could also mean potentially seeking matching for the next grant we would be seeking, specifically a Park Grant, we often use CDBG as a match for other grants that are required to see a match.

North Street Sidewalk – City of Fitchburg **Year 49 Request: \$176,000 – Year 48 Award: n/a**

Installation of concrete sidewalks along the easterly side of North Street between McKay Ave. & Lincoln St. This project would include excavation, gravel, loam, seeding, landscaping, and granite curbing. There is presently no sidewalk on either side of the street. This would present safe access to local students and pedestrians walking between the campuses and the school parking lots at the Civic Center.

Liz Murphy spoke on this application. The project is on the other side of North Street past the McKay school continuing on to John Fitch Highway. There are no sidewalks on either side of the street and this is a major route for pedestrian students to walk to McKay. The City is seeking to provide safe sidewalks for children to go to school.

Paula Caron noted that this project has come up in the past and it is noticeable as the students make their way to the civic center.

Liz notes that the department is trying to prioritize the project.

Nick Erickson, DPW Commissioner, spoke in favor of the project, having this project already been on their radar, he acknowledges that having CDBG funds to complete the project would be extremely helpful.

Twin City Rail Trail Connector – Department of Public Works
Year 49 Request: \$95,000 – Year 48 Award: n/a

The proposed project will pay for consultant fees to help improve existing sidewalks along Railroad St. and provide an ADA-compliant, bike- and pedestrian-friendly, well-marked route from the northern terminus of Phase I of the Twin Cities Rail Trail project to the southern terminus of Phase II of the Twin Cities Rail Trail Project.

Nick explained that the first phase of the Twin City Rail Trail project has already been completed, dumping out to Middle St. DOT is planning to construct phase II of the Rail Trail at some point and that will start at the intersection of First St. and Railroad St. crossing over the railroad tracks to River St. and end at the MBTA Station and train station on the other side of the railroad tracks and the river. Mass DOT is not able to complete the connector between end of phase I and the start of Phase II. This is due to the engineering directives that Mass DOT needs to follow in regards to minimum lists for Bike paths, sidewalks, travel lanes, etc. Mass DOT has asked the City to find a way to fund the project so they don't necessarily need to follow the engineering directives that would make this phase of the project no longer feasible. DPW's goal is to hire a consultant, working with the DPW and Community Development to design a connector between the end of phase one and the start of Phase II to provide accessibility along the route and add signage and marking to make it clear this is the path pedestrians are supposed to take to get from one phase to the next.

Paula noted that the Rail Trail has been well received so far and agreed that completing the next part would be great.

Nick commented that it's a great addition to the City and provides a great option for residents to get out and use the path and do some recreation, providing a footpath connection between Leominster and Fitchburg which is great for those looking to take the train, they can walk or bike to the train if they want to on a relatively safe route without having to navigate the city streets and sidewalks that are not in the best shape.

Paula noted that it could be a good parking area as well.

Mike O'Hara remarked that he has seen a couple of people commuting to work, including a local attorney with an office near the Legislative Building and has seen him on the Rail Trail biking.

Outdoor Fitness Court and Outdoor Fitness Studio – Parks & Recreation Department
Year 49 Request: \$65,000 – Year 48 Award: n/a

Proposed scope of project consists of the installation of a National Fitness Campaign Fitness Court and Fitness Studio to provide all members of the community access to premier outdoor fitness spaces to exercise, play, and do other activities to improve quality of life.

James Bunnell, Director of Recreation returned to the podium to explain recently the National Fitness Campaign Group's goal is to have 10,000 courts across the country. Working towards their goal of doing that, there are a handful of courts out in western Massachusetts already, also on the North and South Shore, but have only thus far been able to get one in Central Massachusetts in Gardner that opened up in the fall. Gardner only has the fitness part of the court that is outdoor and geared toward all ages. It also includes a QR code to access the City's website that gives fitness activities for all ages providing a quick circuit training exercise. James is interested in being the first in Massachusetts to have a fitness studio where you can do stretching, yoga, and a lot of other activities not related to circuit training. He is proposing that the project be located at Coolidge Park that he notes is an untouched gem in Fitchburg. This location was chosen because there is currently already soccer practice, deck hockey, softball, students from the College, and the condominium residents across the street along with many people that go to the dog park and playground. This would be an opportunity for people dropping their kids off at practice or attending a game who can dedicate a small amount of time to completing a circuit training and get some free exercise while they are there. This was discussed with the Parks Commission on Tuesday night of this week and there use to be something similar along one of the trails at Coggs Hall Park that was taken down and people have been asking for something similar to this project in a park people see a great vision for.

Liz commented that she may have seen a similar circuit training courts in Holyoke that may have even been CDBG funded and noted that it looked great.

Paula asked if the project actually designated space or if there was equipment available or if it was just a space to download an app?

James clarified that Coolidge has a lot of open, unused space so he is working with the DPW Commissioner Nick, designated a space where there will be plenty of room, approximately the size of a tennis court, portioning off half for the Circuit stations with the second half being the studio piece. The middle would be the curved wall that along the backside would contain a pre-fabricated mural or a commissioned mural could be put in with additional funds. The project could be expanded later on to include that commissioned mural.

Mike O'Hara did note that if anyone including those he was monitoring virtually had any questions that they could raise their hand using the raise hand chat function and he would see it and make sure they had a chance to speak.

Abolitionist Park – DPW
Year 49 Request: \$100,000 – Year 48 Award: n/a

Proposed scope of work consist of replacing the current sidewalk; the intersections of Snow St. & Union St. and Snow St. & Cherry St. with ADA-compliant concrete sidewalk and wheelchair ramps. Additionally providing additional street parking on the East side of Snow St. Along with the redesign of the concrete side walk to eliminate the current driveway entrance on the park side of Snow St.

Nick Erickson explained this was a project submitted by the Department of Public Works working closely with the Friends of Abolitionist Park and Fitchburg Police Department. Currently there is no parking allowed in that block between Cherry St. and Union St. The plan is to modify the City ordinance to allow parking along the East Side and create a paved apron on that side. They would also like to modify the sidewalk on the park side of the street to close off two curb cuts that use to be driveway entrances for that parcel prior to it becoming a park. They are also looking to improve the sidewalk along that frontage of the park and the ADA accessibility for the intersections on either side of the block. The sidewalks are in need of repair and the wheelchair ramps are not ADA-compliant. There are a lot of events at the park and this would provide parking that would include handicap parking.

David Thibault-Munoz explained that the Friends of Fitchburg Abolitionist Park have had several large events at Abolitionist Park. In terms of accessibility, the aforementioned curbs need to be repaired and adding a wheelchair accessible ramp in front of the entrance would make the park that much more attractive. This project will also improve the “green space” in this area making it more welcoming and more available to local residents who are primarily elderly and disabled.

Low Park Design Plan – Parks & Recreation Department
Year 49 Request: \$75,000 – Year 48 Award: n/a

Proposed scope of project consists of obtaining a design plan to ensure proper funding is acquired when it comes to improving Lowe Park in conjunction with NewVue Redevelopment of the school building and surrounding area. Park creates an improved green space for local community, neighborhood families, children, and senior citizens.

James Bunnell confirmed that there are artist lofts going into the old BF Brown Building for the Fitchburg Arts Community and so there will also be a rejuvenation of Lowe Park. The plan would be to have the funds to design Lowe Park in conjunction with those new artist lofts.

Mark Dohan from NewVue Communities remarked that he thinks this would be a wonderful idea and there are funds available with the development as well through MGL Chapter 40R that were allocated to the City. He further explained that for the redevelopment of BF Brown they are taking a small easement that is being set aside for additional parking spaces for the park. He believes that coordinating the design of the park alongside the BF Brown lofts will lead to additional cost savings and a more fluid transition to bring them both to completion and benefit the community greatly.

Ayn Yeagle of Growing Places commented that this year when she came to the CDBG meeting in November and expressed interest in the Sundial Community Gardens being located in Lowe Park and she would like that taken into consideration of the design to reflect the needs of the people to include those gardens.

James noted that he would like to include them in the process and to reach out to him to coordinate. The community gardens were brought up at the parks commissioning meeting and would love to see the city as a whole benefit from those gardens.

Abolitionist Park Phase 3b – Friends of the Fitchburg Abolitionist Park
Year 49 Request: \$5,000 – Year 48 Award: \$4,651

If funded again, CDBG funds would help FFAP complete the final phase of the Park's development (phase 3b), which includes: the development of an interactive display board, where images of abolitionist come to life to tell their stories and how they were connected to Fitchburg.

David Thibault-Munoz explained that they entered Phase III of the Abolitionist Park Project last year which included a mural completed in the fall and the final piece of the park is the development of an augmented reality. The design includes a long interactive panel which would be funded by CDBG funds and they have already begun compiling the content which includes homes that were included in the Underground Railroad and other symbolic pieces that are included in Fitchburg's history as it relates to the Abolitionist movement and the Underground Railroad. People who would come into the park would be able to view these images and learn about that history including national figures with ties to Fitchburg like Frederick Douglas and Lucy Stone. They already have additional funding in the works as well.

Crocker Field-Broad St. Entry –City of Fitchburg School Department
Year 49 Request: \$7,000 – Year 48 Award: n/a

Funds for the project will restore the concrete pavement at the Broad St. entry by removing the existing asphalt overlay and the original concrete pavement underneath to restore the original appearance.

Lenny Laakso, from the Crocker Field Restoration Committee noted Crocker Field has two main entrances, one at Broad St. and the other at Circle St. About 13 years ago they restored the ornamental gate structures, cast iron gates, and the walkway at Circle St. that has already been restored. This year's funds are being requested to restore the walkway on Broad St. Originally paved in concrete, weather eroded the concrete and the asphalt was laid over the concrete. The asphalt is cracking now and in need of repair. They wish now to remove the asphalt and the original concrete and lay down new concrete to restore it to its original state per the historical guidelines for the field. The School Department has already agreed to match the request for \$7,000 in order to fully fund the project at \$14,000.

Honor Guards – Mulch for Military
Year 49 Request: \$15,000 – Year 48 Award: n/a

The focus of the project is to beautify and maintain military gravesite's markers and install Military Guards to prevent markers from sinking. Part of this also involves thoroughly cleaning the markers - some granite, some bronze. Funds will be used to produce each guard installed, approximately 340.

Francis Richard, President of Mulch for Military stated that his organization installs honor guards around veteran markers. Currently working in 9 cemeteries in central Massachusetts, completing 200 plots last year. Each guard costs \$44-45 apiece to make, indicating he has provided pictures to illustrate the work they do. He described them as a tub that the granite or bronze maker sits inside of providing a border around the marker. Last year he visited multiple cemeteries, working with Michele Marino of Fitchburg, Rick Voutour of Leominster, and the VSOs who provided him a list of veterans in all the cemeteries using the VSO as a resource to get the word out about their organization. Families began reaching out to have guards installed on their loved ones' plots. Many of the plots in poor condition, they began their efforts on World War II and Vietnam vets whose families are most likely no longer here to care for their plots. Because cemeteries are low on staff and without the manpower to take care of the stones, Francis feels the Veterans deserve our support. He does have permission from the maintenance staff to do the work and takes full responsibility for any maintenance. He is not looking to make more work for the staff, but to supplement their work. The markers can be mowed over and weed whacked without any damage done. They are water-resistant.

Nick Erickson spoke in favor of the proposal. He is reaching out to the Board of Cemetery Trustees to make sure all stakeholders are in favor of the proposal.

Safety and Building Updates Coolidge Pool House – Parks & Recreation Department
Year 49 Request: \$23,500 – Year 48 Award: n/a

Funds used to update and improve the pool house at Coolidge so it can operate safely and effectively for the community. Installation of an eye wash station for the employees and pool guests in case of a chemical incident, improve the interior and exterior lighting so staff and guests have safe access to the facility, addition of safety/security lighting and security system to protect and keep the facility safe and secure, and lastly anti-slip coating added to the flooring in and around the pool house to reduce the possibility of people slipping and becoming injured.

James Bunnell returned to explain his main concern is the safety and well-being of the people he is responsible for. His biggest concern is making sure that both the workers and those using the pool are as safe as possible. He had a consultant come out and assess the pool and is asking for the funds to make the updates described in order to make the pool safe again.

Paula did mentioned that she hopes in the future to see plans for a restroom in the future for all the walkers at Coolidge Park.

James has a big vision for the park and hopes to address it in due time.

Commercial Kitchen Capital Reinvestment Project – YMCA of Central Massachusetts
Year 49 Request: \$75,000 – Year 48 Award: n/a

The proposed scope of work in the existing 576 ft. kitchen will replace all major kitchen equipment and most support features. The scope will remove and dispose of equipment that exceeded its life expectancy with replacement of the range and hood, dishwasher, refrigerators and freezer to achieve a fully functional kitchen that meets current codes and design standards. Upgraded electrical power and lighting, cabinet work and refurbished finishes will be included.

Lisa Welcome, executive director of the YMCA of Central Massachusetts of North County, requesting on behalf of the Montachusett Branch located in Fitchburg to provide much needed repairs and updates to their community kitchen used to prepare meals and snacks for over 400 individuals monthly including children from low-income based preschool and childcare programs and homeless individuals whose meals are prepared through their partnership with the North Central Mass Faith-Based Community Coalition. The high cost of repairing their commercial stove has left the kitchen with an inability to prepare hot meals. The funds would allow them to begin work immediately on expansion of the kitchen for additional community use.

Lisa confirmed for Paula that this is the facility at 55 Wallace Ave.

Parking Lot Revitalization – The Rollstone Congregational Church
Year 49 Request: \$15,600 – Year 48 Award: n/a

The Rollstone Congregational Church seeks funding to renovate a small piece of their land to be used as a parking lot. The entire funding request would pay to remove existing asphalt, rocks, and debris, and replace it with base, join the abutting asphalt, and install new asphalt. Building would be used for community-based activities including a polling site, commercial space for Finicky Fork, Small business office space, Boy/Girl Scout troop meeting space, community concerts, Hands of Hope would also share the facilities in feeding and helping the homeless.

Eileen Berger representing the Rollstone Congregational Church. She is here to discuss the decaying piece of land abutting their property given to the church. They are trying to lease out the remaining rooms in their church. They are the kitchen for Finicky Fork using an entirely renovated kitchen, the Boy/Girls scouts, the polling place for Ward 5 and still have opportunities for small businesses to work there as well. It appears that the abandoned parking lot is being used for inappropriate extracurricular activities. However, Hands of Hope is now working there with the homeless on Saturdays. Revitalizing the parking lot would benefit the small businesses working there but also other local businesses would be able to use the parking during the week. The parking lot would lend 30 parking spaces along with the church parking lot which could be an additional 30 spaces.

13 PROPOSALS – \$739,100

PUBLIC SERVICES

The Public Services category is subject to a 15% cap.

Street Outreach – Health Dept.

Year 49 Request: \$70,000 – Year 48 Award: \$26,012

Outreach activities will be conducted by contracted Street Outreach Workers in coordination with partnering agencies including referrals to medical/mental health/substance use treatment, shelter, etc. Outreach activities will include supplying necessary health, hygiene, and safety items as deemed appropriate by the Outreach Workers. Funds will cover one contracted worker and supplies needed.

Steve Curry, Director of Public Health seeking to continue the street outreach program. Some statistics from the last quarter, 258 Naloxone kits distributed to our homeless population, 29 people went to detox as a result of these clinics, 6 people are employed, 6 received housing, 21 have received medical care, 5 mental health services, 25 have committed to work with Restoration Recovery, 25 people have sought some sort of shelter to help get off the streets. They worked with Restoration Recovery and United Way again during the cold Christmas holiday to get an additional 31 individuals off the street to emergency shelter. Please help us continue to support the program and keep the homeless safe and moving in the right direction.

Fitchburg Farmers' Market – Growing Places

Year 49 Request: \$8,495 – Year 48 Award: \$7,327

Project funds will be used to support the Fitchburg Farmers' Market, which helps expand access to healthy food for Fitchburg families, especially marginalized populations, including low-income residents. The Fitchburg Farmers Market Manager, the Assistant Market and Activity Coordinator, the Community Nutrition Coordinator, and weekly hands-on activities for the youth, and a translator will be paid through these funds.

Ayn Yeagle spoke on this proposal. The Farmers' Market has been moved around based on the community need and the needs of the farmers. This year, they would like to hire youth leaders to help conceptualize and implement the activities, increasing vibrancy and attracting families to the market.

Spartacus Program – Montachusett Regional YMCA

Year 49 Request: \$25,000 – Year 48 Award: \$11,148

Program funds will be used to support staff salaries of the Teen Center Spartacus Program. As one of our signature Y initiatives at the Montachusett Community Branch, Spartacus is a program designed to help at-risk teens that are vulnerable to issues, such as substance abuse, failing school and anger management to make healthy decisions. Through a diverse offering of curriculum, including physical engagement, academic tutoring, community service opportunities and workshops focused on topics like anger management, leadership development, and substance abuse, participants build their character, self-confidence, as well as their abilities. Our local partners, such as public school boards, LUK Inc. and MOC, enrich and strengthen our program offerings with additional content. A myriad of adult role models, both from the YMCA and the Fitchburg community at large, allow for teens to constantly learn and grow outside the classroom while

in a safe environment at the branch. With the knowledge they gain, we equip teens with the necessary skills and knowledge to create solutions to the challenges they are presented with in everyday life as they work towards a bright, productive future for themselves.

Lisa Welcome returned to speak to continue the Spartacus program and serve the At-risk youth in the community and expand the number of youth they serve. The program offers physical activities, tutoring, college preparation, community services, and life skills workshops. This programs has been a means for youth to reconnect with others post-pandemic in a safe and fun environment. Annually, this program typically serves 50 youth, now having grown to around 60. The teen center serving anywhere from 100-150 youth a year.

Drug Enforcement Patrol Program – Fitchburg Police Dept.
Year 49 Request: \$65,000 – Year 48 Award: \$60,385

Program funds will be used to provide police overtime monies to conduct drug-related investigations within the designated CDBG areas. Project activities will include arrest, surveillance, and execution of search warrants, drug seizures, weapons seizures, US currency seizures, and vehicle seizures. Additionally, funds will be used to conduct targeted proactive patrols within CDBG areas primarily the downtown area and the rail trail district that falls within the CDBG area.

No one was available to speak on behalf of the sponsors for the program.

Family Homeless Shelter – North Star Family Services
Year 49 Request: \$12,500 – Year 48 Award \$9,290

North Star provides the only safety net program for homeless families in our region. Emergency shelter, meals, clothes, intensive case mgt., educational training, job and housing search, trauma-informed programming, financial literacy, coaching and monitoring. CDBG funds will be used to pay for staff salary costs

Jon Hogue explained that this year they are seeking support for staffing. It is one of the hardest things to find support for. Staffing is critical so we are able to help families in the Fitchburg and Leominster areas. We have asked for additional funding this year due to inflation and because the grant that largely supports the shelter, the ESG (Emergency Solutions Grant) program is no longer going to support them. Jon mentioned that this is due to a change in policy from assisting families to assisting individuals. They are also asking additional funds because their small staff has been pushing themselves overtime and need additional staff support. They are working on a supportive housing program and will be breaking ground for 15 new apartments. This housing stock will be subsidized for low-income families with priority in Leominster and Fitchburg.

Youth Innovation Center: YOUth Empowered Programs – Making Opportunities Count (MOC)
Year 49 Request: \$50,000 – Year 48 Award: n/a

Program funds will be used to provide Consultant support, training, and supplies to the Youth Innovation Center, a recently renovated center in the Cleghorn neighborhood of Fitchburg identified as a disadvantaged area struggling with high rates of poverty and low rates of educational attainment and earnings. The center would give youth access to quality programming, an opportunity to expand the Empower program for the youth, and provide peer engagement, career mentorship, and violence prevention programming.

Nicole Michaud, VP of Advancement from MOC, present on behalf of the Youth Innovation Center. They officially opened their doors yesterday. This grant would support the programming activities they've developed with youth programming. They received a DPH grant recently for a Community violence prevention program being housed in the youth center to support and compliment the youth innovation side and helps to staff the center. These CDBG funds are focused on the YOUth Empowered program helping youth understand their role in race equity and social justice to assist in becoming leaders. They are hoping to expand the program in the innovation center. There are looking to focus on peer mentorship, especially the older youth who have been involved in the center's design to provide structure in their role with training. There is a workforce mentorship component, comprised of local professionals who, for a small stipend as incentive to remain in the program, help nurture the talents and skills of the youth and help lead youth projects by connecting them with the right individuals to foster that growth. The final components being the arts programming which includes a makers' space and a multimedia room where the youth were interested in podcasting, blogging, audio-video production and they have reached out to multiple organizations like FATV and the Fitchburg Art Museum, and local artists to have community members on site multiple times a week to provide programming for the youth.

Mayor's Energy Fund – Mayor's Office
Year 49 Request: \$25,000 – Year 48 Award: n/a

Program funds will be used to assist income-eligible residents with utility assistance. The Mayor's Energy Fund will be an application process, following HUD income guidelines, which will provide funding to help those in need pay for their utilities so they will not be going without heat during our cold winter months and supplementing existing programs such as Making Opportunities Count and the YMCA to reduce the financial burden of qualified, poverty-level families in the consortium.

Joan David spoke on behalf of the Mayor's Office. This is for Fitchburg residents. The Mayor has always wanted to create an energy fund and was approached by the President of IC Credit Union in November with a donation, the Mayor felt it was the opportune time to start the energy fund. This is a way to supplement other agencies to allow families to use their funding for other needs within the household. Funds will go directly to the Utility companies. Applicants will need to be income-eligible for assistance based on 2022 HUD guidelines and the program will be administered through the Mayor's office. We are in the process of accepting the funds and should have funds following the City Council meeting this month and accepting applications following the funds being released.

Homelessness Prevention Project – Community Legal Aid
Year 49 Request: \$20,000 – Year 48 Award: \$10,219

Funds from the Fitchburg CDBG program will allow a CLA Attorney to continue to assist tenants with eviction cases before their court dates and to represent subsidy program participants threatened with termination from the programs, work that we are unable to prioritize in the absence of dedicated funding. This project allows CLA to target specialized housing resources to Fitchburg residents, in an effort to ensure that the City's most vulnerable individuals and families get the legal help they need to prevent homelessness. The ability to focus attention on Fitchburg allows CLA to identify systemic issues that affect many more tenants than just our clients.

Other cases involve housing that is in dire need of repair. CLA is able to assert legal claims that result in improvement to housing conditions, which has the effect of making the unit more livable for the tenant and also increases the quality of the community's housing stock. Landlords in eviction cases are often represented by an attorney, making representation of tenants all the more critical.

Andrew Felper, Senior Grants manager with Community Legal Aid was available to speak on behalf of the program to request funding for the project. This would fund two vulnerabilities within the city, those at-risk for eviction and participants in rental assistance programs like Section 8 and those at-risk for being terminated from the subsidy. The increase in funds requested is to meet the needs of the community which have increased. This is all due to inflation, stagnant wages, and limited supply. Prior grant funding from COVID are set to expire soon so the need remains high. Funds will allow them to dedicate attorneys to low-income renters in the city.

Access to Recovery – Restoration Recovery
Year 49 Request: \$20,000 – Year 48 Award: n/a

Restoration Recovery Center (RRC) is a non-profit, community-based recovery center located in Fitchburg. RRC is guided by a mission to respond to people seeking recovery using a person-centered approach that promotes long-term recovery by providing holistic and faith-based alternatives. RRC is primarily a volunteer-run and peer driven service model. Program funds will be used to pay salary, occupancy, utilities, office supplies, etc.

Mark Armstrong, the Executive Director of Restoration Recovery center, who along with his wife run the program on Fairmount St. Their focus in on recovery support services for individuals whether they are still actively using, new to recovery, or have been in recovery for a while. They offer support groups, relapse prevention, parenting and life skills, recovery reflections, art therapy, smart recovery, music therapy. They focus on a multiple pathway approach with 2 harm reduction specialists, a case manager, and 2 recovery coaches covering coaching for those who can't afford the support. They get a lot of support from GAAMHA, Inc., and CHC. If insurance doesn't cover support services, they get referred to their center for help. They are not billed for services. The center relies solely on grants, donations, and fund-raising, which allows them to help those who would otherwise be turned away. They also assist those in the street outreach program to assist many in getting help with detox, getting an ID, insurance, housing, referrals to RAFT, RCAP, partnering with the City and COC if they are chronically homeless or have a substance abuse disorder. They help them get housing or find shelter. They also have a lot of partnerships with surrounding agencies. The funding would allow them to continue those services.

David Nadeau, a volunteer of Restoration Recovery, came to speak in support of the program. Among those in recovery for the last four years with RR being integral to that recovery with all the resources they provide. He also thanked the Department of Public Health for their partnership that has been wonderful to assist those in need of recovery.

Transportation to Full STEAM Ahead After School Program – Boys and Girls Club of Fitchburg and Leominster

Year 49 Request: \$70,199 – Year 48 Award: \$14,864

Program funds will be used to provide one-way transportation from Fitchburg schools to the Boys and Girls Club Afterschool Program located at 365 Lindell Ave. in Leominster. Approximately 105 youth will be served.

Elizabeth Coveney, in charge of the Boys and Girls Club who is speaking on behalf of the club. They have requested increase in funding as the Club works towards getting back to pre-pandemic levels. Transportation remains one of the biggest challenges to get the youth to and from the Club. The funds act as a buffer for the out-of-pocket expenses that go into the transportation to the club with parent pickup following the programs. They are trying to work with Public Transportation for more take-home programs and solve any transportation barriers that may still occur.

Integrated Community Resources for Veterans – Clear Path for Veterans New England, Inc.

Year 49 Request: \$20,000 – Year 48 Award: n/a

Clear Path NE is requesting CDBG Funding to support hours for a Resource Coordinator to focus on outreach services to Fitchburg Veterans. This position will assist in reaching the most vulnerable Veteran population, low to moderate-income Veterans. The coordinator will collect information on income levels and needs and monitor the health and well-being of the families served. The resource coordinator will provide referrals to resources such as food, housing assistance, financial management, and other related services and activities. A particular concern among this population is isolation; the resource coordinator will arrange for transportation to the Clear Path NE facility, located at Devens, to participate in Veteran-focused activities, including basic health checks, ageless grace workshops, yoga mindfulness, and other programs designed to enhance social connectedness. All activities will be coordinated with the Fitchburg Veteran Service Officer, who may help to identify particularly vulnerable Veterans in the community. The priority focus areas for this cycle will be meeting food insecurity among elderly Veterans and family members in the Fitchburg Community while providing workforce development opportunities for homeless Veterans.

Jeremiah Jones, Outreach Coordinator for Clear Path thanked Michele Marino who he works directly with to take care of the veterans in Fitchburg. Mass. Dept. of Veteran Affairs has identified Fitchburg as a city with little to no outreach for our veterans and elderly. They recently began reaching Fitchburg Veterans by hosting a breakfast to be able to sit with the veterans to establish what their needs were. 22 veterans attended the breakfast. The Fitchburg Senior Center located in the Armory, which includes the Veteran Center on the second floor, is going to continue to host breakfast monthly to serve veterans.

Food Support for Fitchburg Residents – Ginny’s Helping Hand, Inc.
Year 49 Request: \$40,000 – Year 48 Award: n/a

City of Fitchburg CDBG Funding will be restricted to the food costs supporting Fitchburg residents. Seeking to Provide nutritious food to clients each month, improve the health and well-being of families in Fitchburg, and increasing options for healthier food, providing better access to produce, meats, and seafood.

Brandon Robbins, Executive Director of Ginny’s Helping Hand noted Ginny’s, at 52 Mechanic St. in Leominster, a local Non-profit fighting hunger in North Central Massachusetts runs a food pantry. Clients come in twice a month. First, they receive a dry food bag, containing all the typical food items from a food pantry. With their partnership with the local grocery stores, they are also able to provide less shelf-stable items like meat, cheeses, eggs, and dairy, produce, bread, and pastries. In 2021, serving 13,022 clients. In 2022, 23,633 clients. 8,128 of those individuals came from Fitchburg, approximately 34 % of those served. Funding will go towards being able to continue to serve those in the region so no one else goes hungry.

12 PROPOSALS – \$426,194

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Small Business Technical Assistance Program – NewVue Communities
Year 49 Request: \$25,000 – Year 48 Award: \$23,253

NewVue Communities seeks funding to continue to provide technical assistance to small business owners and those positioned to start a small business. Providing business owner counseling, serving minority business owners, and packaging loan (and grant) applications will be the activities that drive our effort to impact the economy in Fitchburg. Funds will be used to pay staff salary costs.

Marc Dohan commented on the past success of this program, and seeks to continue to fund the program in assisting small businesses throughout Fitchburg. They continue to serve over 40 businesses which are primarily minority-owned businesses, a third of which are people of color. They also work with many businesses right within the downtown area and assist them with applying for grants and loans, with a goal of procuring at least \$100,000 in grants and loans from the City and the Chamber of Commerce, working closely with Fitchburg State at in the IdeaLab.

Joe Ferguson, Director of InTown Fitchburg, supports the previous applicant’s proposal. The small business assistance partnership of working with organizations like InTown Fitchburg and businesses City-wide along with the Chamber is what makes these businesses a success.

Main Street Studios – Fitchburg Cultural Alliance
Year 49 Request: \$60,000 – Year 48 Award: n/a

Main Street Studios provides co-worker space and community arts center on Main St. in Fitchburg. It offers affordable studio rentals and community space utilized for meetings, rehearsals, educational/professional development workshops, as well as community events. Main Street Studios is developing a gallery and rental space where artists can display and sell work. This funding will support the staff to manage the facility, retail, and create programs.

Jessie Olsen, the Executive Director of the Fitchburg Cultural Alliance spoke on behalf of the organization noting that in 2019 the Fitchburg Cultural Council held a public input meeting where local creatives expressed the needs for an affordable studio space and Arts Center. A group of Art Stewards from NewVue Community and the Fitchburg Cultural Alliance worked together and got some funding from Mass Development, the TDI Fellow, and Fitchburg State University to identify a space that used to be Fidelity Bank (675 Main St.) and in July 2022 opened Main St. Studios. They now offer 5 artists' studios and 7 working artists which include a visual artist, music teacher, and other teachers and community leaders. There is also an available meeting/workshop/event space. The space allows teaching artists to host a class, space for an artist to monetize their art, take classes in finance, marketing, and how to build a business. They look forward to being a part of the Downtown business sector and draw more business into the City. They seek to make a space for community members to work, sell, and build a network of support around them.

Sign and Façade Program – Community Development and Planning
Year 49 Request: \$60,000 – Year 48 Award: \$55,806

The program will be one tool of many in the City and downtown's economic development toolbox. The City will be working with property owners and code officials to eliminate blighting signage, broken windows, graffiti, and other blighting factors of downtown and several gateway corridors. This will allow the City to provide an incentive for business owners to replace signs and create a more attractive storefront within consistent design standards. This program will leverage other work as a part of the agreement. Business owners will be responsible for some match funding or in-kind improvements. Part of the assistance will include professional sign design using the City's updated design standards.

Liz Murphy provided the context that the City is looking to request an additional \$60,000 in order to assist up to six additional new or existing businesses with their signs. Currently, funding is going toward 4 businesses strictly in the downtown area and there are plans to use the remainder of those funds before the end of this program year. She would like additional funding to assist businesses outside of Main St. area within the City. The City provides the businesses up to \$10,000 or 70% of the cost of the sign through this program.

Fitchburg Downtown Coordinator – Fitchburg State University
Year 49 Request: \$35,000 – Year 48 Award: \$32,554

The Downtown Coordinator position, developed and supported collaboratively by the InTown partnership with Mass Development, Fitchburg State University, and the City of Fitchburg, is a critical component in the revitalization efforts underway in downtown Fitchburg. This position works directly with microenterprises by offering marketing and promotional services to grow sales and revenue for the overall economic development of downtown. The Downtown Coordinator is also responsible for developing and implementing events and activities that attract more visitors to the downtown area. Program funding will pay a portion of the Coordinator's salary.

Joe Ferguson, Director of InTown Fitchburg, first gave his support for both Main St. Studios and the Signs and Facades programs that compliments much of the work being done downtown. He is requesting level funding from Year 48. The Downtown Coordinator will market and promote small businesses citywide and connecting those small businesses to the events within the city. Matching funds are in place with the University.

Mary Jo Bohart, Economic Development Coordinator echoed what Joe said and the importance of the Downtown Coordinator and having someone to assist those businesses and helping bring customers to those businesses being critical to the success of the Downtown.

Fitchburg Public Market – Worcester Regional Food Hub
Year 49 Request: \$50,000 – Year 48 Award: n/a

The Worcester Regional Food Hub (WRFH) desires to bring a satellite of the successful Worcester incubator model to Fitchburg. They intend to disrupt the current state of population health and institutional inequities by not only addressing workforce and economic development, but also food insecurity and access to healthy foods. This will be by means of launching a public market which will highlight local food entrepreneurs who will sell their products wholesale and on-site, coupled with associated retail and eatery space. Funding will be to cover the first year of operational costs needed to launch the venture in downtown Fitchburg. The WRFH, which created a well-known brand of educating, training, and incubating rising food entrepreneurs in Central Massachusetts for the past several years, is growing. As they expand to Union Station in Worcester, the WRFH also seeks to add a satellite location in Fitchburg and brand it the Fitchburg Public Market (FPM).

Shon Rainford, Director of the Worcester Regional Food Hub and Fitchburg Public Market is seeking to open a shared use kitchen and food retail site in downtown Fitchburg. They have a history of helping open small businesses largely through low-income and immigrant populations. They can help develop family recipes into brick and mortar restaurants or putting their products on store shelves. This opportunity includes training and technical assistance to make them legal and provide certifications and the proper equipment. This would truly be an economic development driver. The goal being to fill Main St. with thriving, diverse eateries. The location for the market would be 35 Main St.

Ayn Yeagle asked how Shon saw the synergy between the Worcester Public Market and the Fitchburg Public Market given the overlap and requested he expand on whether they serve food insecure populations and expand on what that model looks like to see if they could work together.

Shon acknowledged that the Food Hub and Growing Places have worked together for years and viewed the two markets as complimentary. The Farmers' Market is more of a produce and farmers type grocery market whereas this Public Market would act as an economic driver to food entrepreneurs to open restaurants and those looking to put their products on grocery store shelves.

Mary Jo commented that the city has been paying attention, looking for an experienced operator that would be willing to help us spawn the kind of facility this market would be, giving those microenterprise entrepreneurial businesses a place for these foods to be made. This is already a successful endeavor in Worcester so this would be a terrific way to bring it to Fitchburg and make use of the location mentioned.

4 PROPOSALS – \$220,000

REHABILITATION AND PRESERVATION

Critical Home Repair – Habitat for Humanity **Year 49 Request: \$20,000 – Year 48 Award: \$18,602**

Critical Home Repair is exterior or interior work to alleviate critical health, life, and safety issues or code violations for homeowners in need. Participants must own their own home and have a verifiable need that falls within scope and capabilities. The home must be a primary principal residence, current on mortgage, property taxes and insurance. Repairs must be necessary to function in the home and homeowners must partner with Habitat.

Don Capman, a family advocate for Critical Home Repair, has been a part of the project for the past four years with CDBG and they provide services like wheelchair ramps and accessibility, roofs, deck repair, any critical work required to keep a client in their home. So far they've helped 13 families in Fitchburg to stay in homes and this year they hope to help an additional 3-6 families with home repairs. They work strictly through volunteers with professional supervision and appreciate any support.

Code Enforcement – Health Department **Year 49 Request: \$108,139 – Year 48 Award: \$96,224**

The Health Department provides comprehensive code enforcement to encourage housing rehabilitation, in the City of Fitchburg's lower income neighborhoods. Code Enforcement activities will continue with goals to address substandard housing conditions and conditions of slum and blight in target neighborhoods. Funds will be used to pay for one sanitary code inspector and 50% of one clerk position.

Steve Curry reviewed the program activities. The code enforcement that has been funded for the past 15 years will now be working mostly in the new ordinance recently passed and addressing the vacancies downtown and continue the work in the target areas, completely roughly 150-200 inspections on multi-family units and 600-700 dwellings for those buildings creating blight.

2 PROPOSALS – \$128,139

DEMOLITION/CLEARANCE

Demolition –Community Development and Planning
Year 49 Request: \$175,000 – Year 48 Award: n/a

Proposed scope of project consists of the removal of abandoned structures that pose an imminent threat to public safety and contribute to slum and blight conditions. The presence of abandoned and blighted properties, which are subject to vandalism and other criminal activity, lowers property values, discourages neighborhood investment and undermines neighborhood improvement initiatives. Removal of these properties is an important step in revitalization of our neighborhoods.

Liz Murphy confirmed the need for demolition. There are multiple buildings in the city that are no longer useful and have been deemed unsafe. Right now the City is working with the Problem Property Task Force which has multiple Departments heads within the task force who help to develop and identify a list of buildings so that we may begin the process to be demolished using these funds. If the buildings are privately owned, the owners will be asked to remedy the issues in order to avoid demolition. The City has a fair share that are eligible for demolition and believe the funds will carry out roughly 3-4 demolitions. Asbestos abatement among other abatement hazards drives up the cost of the demolition, however, they should have a list of properties narrowed down by the time the funds are available in July.

1 PROPOSAL – \$175,000

PLANNING AND ADMINISTRATION

CDBG Administration –Community Development and Planning
Year 49 Request: \$210,000 – Year 48 Award: \$185,844

Project funds will provide for the necessary administration of CDBG programs and sub-recipient contracts in accordance with federal guidelines, including staffing, technical services, and planning activities. This also includes the cost of various activities such as the Consolidated Plan; Consolidated Annual Performance Report; Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing; and other strategic plans and services. These funds enable the City to apply for, receive, and administer additional federal and state grants. (Funding will not exceed 20% of entitlement.)

Liz Murphy noted that the project funds the CDBG program including events like tonight. It also funds 2.5 full time employees and allows us to apply for other grant funding to match and leverage the CDBG funding and further the work being done in the program.

Paula reminded everyone that some of these categories do have caps and the Planning Board will have further recommendations following the meeting on January 24, 2023.

1 PROPOSAL – \$210,000

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:00 pm.

Minutes approved: 1/24/23