HOME Investment Partnerships Program

Citizen Participation Plan (CPP)
A. Purpose of the Citizen Participation Plan (CPP)

It is the policy of the County of Mercer to ensure adequate citizen involvement in the planning, implementation, and devaluation of its housing and community development programs. The following CPP establishes the citizen participation standards for purposes of the HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) and the American Dream DownPayment Initiative (ADDI) programs.

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 who are CDBG entitlement communities shall also adopt and implement a CPP that complies with the requirements of 24 CFR Part 91.105.

The Consolidated Plan is a HUD requirement that combines the planning and application process for both County HOME and ADDI programs. The Consolidated Plan examines the current housing situation, explores the housing and community development needs of the County, and sets priorities for spending HUD grant funds. Public comment is a vital component of exploring the County’s housing and community development needs and setting spending priorities. The Consolidated Plan offers the opportunity for strategic Countywide planning to occur in conjunction with citizen participation.

B. Participation

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 member are highly encouraged to participate in the process as well as established Community Housing Development organizations (CHDO’s). Jurisdictions are expected to take whatever actions are appropriate to encourage the participation of all its residents, including minorities and non-English.

The primary purpose of the programs covered by this CPP is to expand the supply of decent, safe, sanitary, and affordable housing for very low and low income people and strengthen the abilities of state and local governments to provide housing.
Due to the amount of Federal HOME and ADDI funds Mercer County receives and administers each program year is based on the need for affordable housing and the need to repair substandard housing conditions. The County recognizes the importance of public participation that genuinely involves people who have experienced these conditions. It is the County’s intent to provide opportunities for meaningful involvement by low-income people at all stages of the process, including:

- Needs identification
- Priority setting
- Funding allocations
- Program recommendations

C. Consolidated Plan Process

Procedures in this CPP relate to five specific steps that require action. The steps include:

1. Needs Assessment – identification of Housing needs that generally occurs during the development of the Consolidated Plan.
3. Approval – formulation of the Final Plan.
4. Amendment to the Plan – when a change is made in the proposed use of funds in the Annual Action Plan or priorities set out in the Consolidated Plan.

D. Public Notice

1. Documents Requiring Public Notice

   b. Proposed Five (5) Year Consolidated Plan Draft/Final Five (5) Year Consolidated Plan
   c. Any Proposed Substantial Amendment
   d. Consolidated Annual Performance Evaluation Report (CAPER)

   The County will also provide public notice of all public hearings related to funds or to the planning process covered by this CPP.

E. Adequate Advance Public Notice

   HUD considers two (2) weeks advance public notice to be adequate for the public to be informed for comment.
1. **Forms of Public Notice**

Public notices will be published in a local newspaper (Trenton Times or Trentonian) for all public hearings associated with section D (1). Notice will also be given through mailings and via email to other organizations or individuals who may be of assistance in the planning process. Notification of any public hearings will also be posted on the County website.

Any proposed item in section D (1) will be published to afford citizens, public agencies and other interested parties a reasonable opportunity to examine its contents and to submit comments. The requirement for publishing will be accomplished by presenting a summary of the proposed document in the above-mention publications, as well as on the County website.

F. **Public Access to Information**

The County of Mercer will provide the public with reasonable and timely access to information and records relating to the data or content of the 5 Year Consolidated Plan/Annual Action Plan, as well as the proposed, actual, and past use of funds covered by this CPP. In addition, the County will provide with reasonable and timely access to local meetings related to the proposed use of funds.

1. **Standard Documents**

Standard documents include: the proposed and final Annual Action Plans, the proposed and final Consolidated Plans, proposed and final Substantial Amendments to an Annual Action Plan or Consolidated Plan, Comprehensive Annual Performance Evaluation reports and this Citizen Participation Plan (CPP).

2. **Availability of Standard Documents**

In the spirit of encouraging public participation, copies of standard documents will be provided to the public for review and comment. These materials will be made available in a form accessible to persons with disabilities, upon request to the HOME Program manager at (609) 989-6858.

3. **Available Locations**

Standard documents are made available at the following places:

a. Mercer County Housing & Community Development Office
   640 South Broad Street, Room 420, P.O. Box 8068
G. Public Hearings

Public hearings will be held at key stages of the process to obtain the public’s view and to provide the public with the opportunity to comment and ask questions regarding the process and the plan before them. The County will provide to the great extent possible an open forum to address any concerns, and provide answers to the questions citizens may have. The County holds the public hearings to obtain input regarding community needs during the development stages of the Consolidated Plan and annual Action Plans, and the review of program performance.

1. Access to Public Hearings

Public hearings will be held only after there has been adequate notice. At a minimum, an advertisement in a local publication (Trenton Times or Trentonian) shall be published fourteen (14) days before the hearing. The County website will also post the public hearing dates and times as well.

Public hearings are held at various locations throughout the Mercer County Consortium, easily accessible by public transit.

All public hearings are held at locations accessible to people with disabilities. If non-English speaking or hearing impaired residents request assistance to participate in a public hearing, the County will provide the appropriate assistance to the greatest extent possible.

A minimum of two hearings must be conducted per year to obtain citizens’ views and to respond to proposals and questions, to be conducted at a minimum of two different stages of the program. Together, the hearings must address housing and community development needs, development of proposed activities, and review of program performance.

Public Hearing (s) for the Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plans are typically held in February or March of every year.

Each Plan and amendment hearing shall allow a minimum of 30 days to receive public comment commencing on the date of the first notice appears, excluding amendments required by HUD, which do not require the usual public process or for which abbreviated or specific standards are
provided. Each CAPER hearing shall allow 15 days for public comment, commencing on the date the first notice appears.

2. **Procedures for Receiving Public Comment for Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plan**

   A summary of comments received during the public comment period and at any public hearing for an amendment or CAPER shall be documented, considered and summarized in an attachment with the final documents submitted to HUD. A written record of the comments received during the public hearing for the Plan or update shall be considered in preparing the final Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan.

H. **Amendments to the Consolidated Plan – Substantial Change Criteria**

   Substantial changes to the County’s planned or actual activities will require an amendment to the Consolidated Plan. Substantial Amendment Criteria:

   1. Change in allocation priorities or method of distribution of funds, or
   2. Change in the purpose, scope, location or beneficiaries of an activity, or
   3. To carry out an activity using funds from any program covered by the Consolidated Plan, (including program income), not previously described in the action plan.

   The County will provide reasonable notice of a proposed Substantial Amendment so that residents will have an opportunity to review and comment on it. Notice will be made according to the procedures described in Section E of this CPP and will allow a 30-day period for public comment. In preparing a final Substantial Amendment, due consideration will be given to all comments and views expressed by the public. The final Substantial Amendment will have a section that presents all comments and an explanation of why comments were not accepted.

I. **Consolidated Annual Performance Evaluation report (CAPER)**

   Every year the County must submit to HUD the Consolidated Annual Performance Evaluation Report (CAPER), within 90 days of the close of the program year, i.e., by September 28. In general, the CAPER describes how funds were actually expended and to the extent to which these funds were used for activities that benefited low and moderate income people.

   The County will provide reasonable notice that the CAPER is available so that residents will have the opportunity to review and comment. Notice will be made according to procedures described in section D (1) of this CPP.
Public comments will be accepted during a 15-day comment period described in the public notice.

Copies of the CAPER will be made available to the public upon request.

In preparing the CAPER for submission to HUD, consideration will be given to all comments and views expressed by the public, orally or submitted in writing. The CAPER that is forwarded to HUD will have a section that represents all comments.

J. **Access to Records**

The County will provide to citizens, public agencies, and other interested persons access to all HOME documents in review or in final status. Copies will be provided at no cost. The County Housing Office will also provide reasonable public access to records relating to the Consolidated Plan and use of assistance for a period proceeding five (5) years.

K. **Technical Assistance**

Upon request, limited technical assistance for developing funding proposals will be provided by the HOME Program Manager to group’s representative of low-to-moderate income. Funding is not guaranteed.

L. **Complaint Procedures**

Written complaints from the public about the County’s citizen participation Process or Plan will receive careful consideration and will be answered in writing within 15 working days.

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