

MINUTES
Cheshire County Commissioners Meeting
Wednesday February 7, 2018 09:30AM
County Hall Building
Stillman Rogers Conference Room
12 Court Street, Keene, NH 03431

Present: Commissioners Peter Graves, Joseph Cartwright, and Charles Weed

Staff: County Administrator Coates, Finance Director Trombly, Grants Manager Bansley, County Attorney McLaughlin, and Assistant County Administrator Bouchard

Guests: Rebeckah Bullock Southwest Regional Planning, Linda Mangones, CDBG Administrator, Keene Housing Authority, Jack Dugan, President, Monadnock Economic Development Corporation, Cindy Stewart, County Courthouse Fund Raising Project Manager.

At 9:30AM the Chair opened the meeting and took-up Master Agenda Item #555: CDBG Mid-grant hearing for Bensonwood/Unity Homes for the purpose of conducting a mid-grant public hearing to allow the public to comment on the Bensonwood/Unity Homes CDBG economic development grant project that sub-granted funds to Monadnock Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) to purchase and renovate an existing industrial building located at 29 Production Ave in Keene to be leased to Bensonwood/Unity Homes of Walpole, a manufacturer of sustainable custom buildings, so they may expand their operations and create at least 15 jobs. The total project cost is approximately \$10 million. The grant amount is \$300,000.00

The Chair opened the first public hearing for discussion of the CDBG project at 9:30AM and read the public hearing notice.

Rebeckah Bullock, Community Development Specialist with Southwest Region Planning Commission provided some details on the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. It is a requirement of the CDBG program to hold a public hearing while a project is underway to allow the public the opportunity to comment and ask questions about the project.

First, she provided an update on the Riverbend Housing Rehabilitation project. Cheshire County was awarded \$500,000.00 in CDBG Housing and Public Facilities funds to support the Riverbend Housing Rehabilitation project. Cheshire County sub-granted the majority of the funds to Keene Housing, who used the funds to support the rehabilitation of Riverbend Housing, located at 836 West Swanzey Road in Swanzey. The project benefits 24 households, all of which are low to moderate income.

Bullock noted that at this time, the Riverbend Housing Rehabilitation project is nearly complete. The rehabilitation project was completed during the fall of 2017. This project is scheduled to close out by June 30, 2018.

The Chair opened the floor to public comment on the projects.

Public comments only comments received was a letter from Keene Housing Authority presented by Linda Mongones.

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831 Court Street, Keene, NH 03431

PHONE & TTD -- 603.352.6161
FAX -- 603.352.6845

TO: Cheshire County Commissioners
Chris Coates, County Administrator

FROM: Josh Meehan, Executive Director 

RE: Riverbend Apartments Community Development Block Grant (CDBG):
Final Report on Riverbend project

DATE: February 6, 2018

The purpose of this letter is to report the results of the CDBG grant which provided \$500,000 to Keene Housing for the purpose of making improvements to Riverbend Apartments in Swanzey.

Keene Housing developed Riverbend Apartments in 1996 using the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program and a loan as the funding sources. The development includes 24 two- and three-bedroom apartments and is located on the west side of Route 10 south of West Swanzey. The LIHTC program is sometimes challenging as many tenants who meet the eligibility requirements cannot afford the LIHTC rent. As a result, it had been possible to do day-to-day maintenance at Riverbend, but impossible to accumulate the level of capital reserves necessary to make the major improvements which are usually needed after twenty to thirty years. When Keene Housing approached the County in late 2015, the property needed total replacement of its boilers, its roof, its siding, and its windows.

Two years later, we are very pleased with the results of this project, which has had exactly the desired result: all of the boilers, roofs, siding, and windows, are new. In addition, Keene Housing was able to purchase some new stoves, refrigerators, faucets, and bathroom exhaust fans. To improve the operating budget, Keene Housing had already placed project-based rent subsidies at all units in the property and simplified the property ownership by transferring it from the Limited Partnership which developed it to Keene Housing. As a result of this combination of money and effort, Riverbend Apartments should be permanently financially sustainable and able to adequately fund its capital reserves so that outside funding is not needed in the future.

The project ended slightly under budget, so \$14,100 of the CDBG funds will not be used and will become available for future CDBG grants. In addition to the CDBG funds, Keene Housing itself contributed about \$243,000 of the total cost of the project.

As you may know, LIHTC developments with two- and three-bedroom apartments are sometimes described as "workforce housing". Of the 24 households living at Riverbend, eighteen have an adult who is employed. The remaining six households have a head of household who is disabled.

As a requirement of this grant, Keene Housing executed a promissory note for \$472,500 and provided a mortgage to Cheshire County for that amount. The mortgage has a twenty year term,

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and provides for a reduction of five percent (5%) each year that Keene Housing continues to maintain the property for the use of low and moderate income persons. At the end of this period, Keene Housing will request that the County release the mortgage.

On behalf of Keene Housing and current and future Riverbend residents, I want to thank the County Commissioners and County staff for helping us to accomplish this very worthwhile project. We particularly appreciate the County's quick response when we learned that the Town of Swanzey was unable to apply for the grant.

cc. Rebekah Bullock, CDBG Administrator, Southwest Region Planning Commission

The Chair closed the public hearing at 9:39AM.

Master Agenda Item #556: CDBG Mid-grant hearing for Riverbend Rehab was then taken-up for discussion and Bullock said that this public hearing is for the purpose of conducting a mid-grant public hearing to allow the public to comment on the Riverbend Rehab CDBG housing and community development grant project that sub-granted funds to Keene Housing to rehab the 24-unit Riverbend Apartments on Route 10 in West Swanzey, replace roofs, windows, siding, boilers, replace boilers, and install water filtration system. The grant amount is \$500,000.00.

The Chair opened the second public hearing for discussion of the CDBG project at 9:39AM.

Bullock provided an update on the MEDC/Benson Woodworking/Unity Building Technologies Community Development Block Grant project. Cheshire County was awarded \$300,000.00 in CDBG Economic Development funds to support the MEDC/Benson Woodworking/Unity Building Technologies project. Cheshire County sub-granted the majority of the funds to the Monadnock Economic Development Corporation, who formed a limited liability company to own the building located at 25 Production Ave in Keene, NH. Unity Homes Technologies now leases the 104,000-square foot building from the limited liability company.

Unity Building Technologies is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Benson Woodworking Company Inc. The project will result in the creation of 15 new jobs, of which at least 9 will be filled by persons from low or moderate-income households. The project will result in the creation of 15 new jobs, of which at least 9 will be filled by persons from low or moderate-income households.

At this time, the MEDC/Benson Woodworking/Unity Building Technologies project is nearly complete. As of the most recent reporting period, all but one (1) of the jobs identified in the application had been filled. This project is scheduled to close out by December 31, 2018.

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The Chair opened the floor to public comment on the projects.

Public comments included an overview of the project by Dugan and he said that although most of the equipment has been installed a major piece of equipment is being shipped from Germany and should arrive soon. He described the partnership with Bensonwood and said that in six (6) years Bensonwood would fully own the building and all of the equipment.

Coates then related the information gleaned from a meeting last week with the Pease Foreign Trade Zone staff that could possibly assist Bensonwood and other local companies.

The Chair closed the public hearing at 9:47AM.

The Commissioners thanked Bullock and Mangones for their work and then took-up Master Agenda Item #557: Semi-Annual Report – Grants for discussion.

Grants Manager Bansley provided the Commissioners with printouts of the current grants and discussed the status of managed grants and pending applications.

1. 39 grants with an award value of \$10.3 million (*↓ 2 grants, \$345,922*)
 - 2016 year-end: 41 grants, \$10.7 million
 - 2015 year-end: 42 grants, \$5.8 million

2. Revenue of \$2.7 million, includes \$115k admin (*↑ \$204,295/\$35k admin*)
 - 2016 revenue of \$2.5 million includes \$80k in admin
 - 2015 revenue of \$1.2 million includes \$63k in admin

3. Grants Written in 2017 = 24
 - Awarded = 10
 - Bulletproof vests, CDBG micro, Dobles, DOTPOS, Drug Court State of NH, Highway Safety, NHCF-MVP, NHCF-SOC, PHN, VOCA
 - Pending = 6
 - EMPG, Homeland, JAG, Johnson-Courthouse, PUC Renewable, Severe Weather Resiliency
 - Denied = 8
 - CDFA L5, Cogswell Courthouse, LCHIP, NHCF, Opioid Reduction, Trails, Walmart DC Incentives, Weber Courthouse
 - Working on now = 1 (Save America's Treasures)
 - Starting soon = 4 (Cogswell, Corning, McIninch, Moose Plate)

The Commissioners asked a number of questions about the grant programs and applications and Bansley answered each inquiry to the Commissioners satisfaction.

Cindy Stewart was then recognized and provide an update on the fund raising for the rehabilitation of the windows and cupola. She reiterated that the New Hampshire Land and

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Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP) grant has been matched and that further funding raising efforts continue. She said that a total of \$150,000.00 is the first goal and the second goal will be to raise a total of at least \$725,000.00 to rehabilitate the courthouse cupola.

She outlined the contacts and efforts underway to raise the funds that are needed. She discussed the work and number of contacts being addressed and said that she is hopeful that greater involvement of local community members and companies will occur in the coming months.

A discussion of the utilization of the facilities was had and Coates outlined a number of organizations that are currently using the facilities and an number of other organizations that are interested in using the building for private and public functions.

County Attorney McLaughlin was then recognized and said that he wished to discuss a hiring matter with the Commissioners.

At 10:33AM Commissioner Cartwright moved to enter non-public session to discuss pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II(b) The hiring of any person as a public employee. Commissioner Weed seconded the motion and upon vote the motion passed unanimously.

As a result of deliberations in non-public session a decision was made to offer the County Attorney Administrative Support position to S. T. at an hourly rate of \$15.28 based on their training, education, and experience with Commissioners Graves and Cartwright Voting Yay and Commissioner Weed Voting Nay. The motion passed 2-1.

At 10:48AM the Commissioners voted unanimously to return to public session.

A question concerning the County rules about advertising internally for candidates for open positions vs. only advertising externally began and it was determined that although advertising internally is usually done by the departments it is not mandatory to do so.

Administrator Coates was then recognized and asked to discuss a pending legal matter with the Commissioners that would require a non-public session.

At 10:58AM Commissioner Graves moved to enter non-public session to discuss pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II(e) the consideration or negotiation of pending claims or litigation which has been threatened in writing or filed against this board or any subdivision thereof, or against any member thereof because of his or her membership therein, until the claim or litigation has been fully adjudicated or otherwise settled. Commissioners Cartwright seconded the motion and upon vote the motion passed unanimously.

As a result of deliberations in non-public session no decisions were made and no vote was taken.

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At 11:26AM the Commissioners voted unanimously to return to public session.

Administrator Coates was then provided the following Weekly Operations Report:

He said the clean-up of the site is underway with a local firm and that the total expenses should be well within the originally allocated budget for the project.

Coates then said that negotiations with the contractor hired to demolish the old jail structure in Westmoreland have concluded and a reduced termination payment will be paid for the work that was completed in taking down the structure. He then said that a formal termination of the contract and mutual release agreement is being completed today and will be signed before payment is made.

Coates spoke to a follow-up email that he has received from the Pease Foreign Trade Zone and said that he has forwarded to the Commissioners.

Coates said that the former President of the Commissioners Council has stepped down from the NH Association of Counties and new leadership has moved into place including Charles (Chuck) Weed who will service as the Vice-President. A discussion of the groups organizational structure that is being studied by the membership began and alternatives were reviewed.

Coates said that he has reached out to other Counties concerning their support of local outside agency funding throughout the State and will compile a synopsis for review. A discussion of the Executive Committee review meeting that was held on Monday was had.

Coates said he and the Maplewood Nursing Home Administrator are meeting at 1:00PM today with the senior staff at Cheshire Medical Center to discuss the Maplewood Medical Director's position that remains open.

He then said that he has been working with Senator Kahn concerning obtaining thermal credits for the new jail's geo-thermal installation. He stated that at this time he wasn't sure if the request can be accommodated given the short time frame and legislative agenda items that would need to be addressed.

Coates inquired if the Commissioners are still interested in continuing with the sale of the Blood Farm. The consensus from the Commissioners is that the house is still on the market but must be sold on a "as is where is" basis.

Coates then discussed that the money for the Courthouse rehabilitation fund raisers position will end this month. He said that the window restoration project RFP will be released shortly and that it is anticipated that the next round of fundraising will likely restart sometime in September.

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Trombly then presented the final MS-46 (County Proposed Budget and Estimate of Revenue) for signature to the Commissioners. Following a short review all three (3) Commissioners signed the document. Trombly will forward to the State Department of Revenue Administration per the NH RSA.

Trombly then reviewed the current draft of the 2018 budget with the Commissioners that was a result of the Executive Session deliberations of the last few weeks.

New Business – Commissioner Cartwright said that would like to have a heating analysis done on the jail’s heating and cooling costs to ascertain why the budget is being exceeded.

Old Business – Commissioner Weed met with the person who designed the seating platforms (risers) that were used at the recent theater performance and asked if they could be used in delegation meetings. Coates said that the platforms were on loan from a third party and it was unlikely that they would be interested in an on-going loan relationship. He also said that due to the lack of storage space in the buildings it was not possible to create similar risers and store them when not in use.

The minutes of February 1, 2018 were then reviewed and Commissioner Cartwright moved to accept the minutes as amended and was seconded by Commissioner Weed. Upon vote the motion passed unanimously.

The Commissioners Calendar was then reviewed.

The Weekly Census was reviewed and discussed.

The Weekly Manifest was then reviewed and Commissioner Weed moved to accept the Manifest as presented and was seconded by Commissioner Cartwright. Upon vote the motion passed unanimously.

At 12:38PM there being no further business to discuss, Commissioner Cartwright moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion to adjourn was then seconded by Commissioner Weed and upon vote the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,
C. Weed