

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PLAN

The purpose of Burlington County's Citizen Participation Plan is to create opportunities for and encourage citizen involvement in the development of the County's Consolidated Housing and Community Development Plan, Annual Action Plans, amendments to the Plan, and performance reports. This Citizen Participation Plan outlines the County's policies and procedures for public engagement in the consolidated planning process.

CONSOLIDATED HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

For Burlington County and various entities within the County to be eligible to receive funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for Community Planning and Development Programs, the County must have an approved Consolidated Housing and Community Development Plan. This Consolidated Plan consists of three primary components: the Housing Plan, the Homeless Assistance Continuum of Care, and the Community and Economic Development Plan. Each component includes a needs assessment, an analysis identifying priorities, and a strategy that establishes goals and objectives for addressing priority needs, along with time frames for achieving them.

Annual Action Plans are developed each year to identify actions to be taken and projects funded to achieve the strategy's goals and objectives. The Annual Plan also functions as the County's application for grants offered by HUD, which generally include:

- The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program supports community development activities aimed at building stronger and more resilient communities. These activities may address needs such as infrastructure, economic development projects, installation of public facilities, community centers, housing rehabilitation, public services, clearance and acquisition, microenterprise assistance, code enforcement, and homeowner assistance. Activities are identified through an ongoing process.
- The HOME Investment Partnership (HOME) Program is a block grant designed to create affordable housing for low-income households.
- Any additional emergency funding, such as CDBG-CV funding, to assist communities in responding to the impacts of infectious diseases and potential future pandemics.

The overall goal of HUD's Community Planning and Development programs and the County's Consolidated Plan is to create viable communities by providing decent housing, a suitable living environment, and increased economic opportunities, primarily for low- and moderate-income individuals.

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE COUNTY GOVERNMENT

When the County receives a Housing and Community Development grant, it establishes a contractual relationship with HUD to implement programs in accordance with specific HUD regulations. Certain County officials are then legally accountable for carrying out designated duties and activities outlined in the established contracts.

Citizens must understand that their role is to advise and assist County officials in carrying out contractual

obligations. Since no citizen would have a contractual responsibility with HUD, all citizens must serve as advisors and advocates only.

CONSOLIDATED PLAN DEVELOPMENT PARTICIPATION

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION OPPORTUNITIES

While the County develops the Consolidated Plan, citizens are encouraged to share their views, opinions, and information on relevant topics, such as the housing and community development needs of low- and moderate-income populations, the nature and location of necessary community improvements, and proposed activities to address these needs.

PUBLIC HEARING

During the development phase of the Consolidated Plan, Burlington County publicly announces and conducts at least two public hearings. The public notice and the public hearings provide the following information:

- The yearly amount of block grant funds that the County anticipates receiving from HUD
- Activities that may be undertaken using these funds.
- The estimated amount of funding used to benefit the County's low and moderate-income populations.

MUNICIPAL PUBLIC HEARINGS

Any municipality that intends to apply for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program must advertise and hold a public hearing on its proposed CDBG project. In accordance with the Sunshine Law, a notice of the hearing is published at least ten days prior to the hearing, and a description of the proposal is made available for public review during this time and at the hearing.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE WORKSHOP

Technical assistance for the Community Development and HOME Programs helps guide applicants in developing their funding proposals. A Technical Assistance Workshop takes place before the submission date for CDBG and HOME applications. Workshops are advertised through public notices on the county website and are included in the pre-application guidebook.

INDIVIDUAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The Community Development Program staff is available to meet individually with citizens or citizen groups who wish to express their opinions and suggestions in a personal and less formal manner than in a public meeting. These meetings are scheduled by a citizen or a representative of a citizen group.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The purpose of Burlington County's Community Development Advisory Committee is to study the community development needs, prioritize funding, and recommend activities for funding. The membership of the advisory committee is structured to represent a broad base of expertise and to represent the interests of the local community comprehensively. The members include the mayors of each municipality in the county, along with twenty (20) citizens appointed by the Burlington County Commissioners.

These meetings are open to the public.

Meeting Purposes

The General Advisory Committee meets monthly unless otherwise noted in the meeting schedule. The GAC meeting schedule is posted according to the Open Public meetings act.

- A. After a thorough evaluation, the GAC recommends the programs to the Burlington County Board of County Commissioners for approval and implementation.
- B. The Division Head of the Community Development Program shall have the right to call emergency meetings of the General Advisory Committee. These meetings, requiring at least 48 hours' prior notice, demonstrate our commitment to transparency and public participation. All meetings and hearings shall be open to the public and duly advertised at least 48 hours before each meeting, with notice given to each municipality and the Board of County Commissioners—notifications also available on the Community Development and Housing website <https://www.co.burlington.nj.us/257/Community-Development-Housing>.
This ensures that all stakeholders are informed and able to participate in the process.
- C. Members must attend at least 50% of the General Advisory meetings. If a member must miss a meeting, they should communicate with the Division of Community Development and Housing before the meeting.
- D. A vacancy is deemed to have occurred if any of the following occur:
 - 1. Member fails to attend three consecutive monthly meetings.
 - 2. Member voluntarily declines to remain a member.

BURLINGTON COUNTY CONTINUUM OF CARE (CoC)

The CoC serves as the lead organization for homeless assistance planning and advocacy in the County. The CoC Committee is responsible for planning the County's Homeless Assistance Continuum of Care System and making recommendations for funding to support that system.

The CoC Committee consists of social service providers from public and private non-profit agencies that offer services and housing opportunities for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness. Representatives include state and County Human Services Departments, the County Board of Social Services, social service providers, emergency shelter operators, neighborhood groups, housing developers, realtors, local businesses, service users, and at least one person who is formally homeless. CoC Committee meetings are open to the public and take place bimonthly.

OTHER PUBLIC VENUES

To encourage participation in the development of the plan by community organizations, service agencies, citizen groups, and similar entities, the County Community Development Program staff maintains representation on several committees: the Human Services Advisory Council, the Office on Aging Advisory Council, and the Burlington County Coalition for the Homeless and Coordinated Assessment. These committees meet regularly and monthly, providing forums for information exchange. Committee meetings are typically open to the public.

The Community Development Office seeks out and consults with groups representing special needs populations (senior citizens, the disabled, veterans, etc.), low-income neighborhoods, minorities, public housing and assisted housing residents. Such groups are encouraged to contact the Community Development Program Office to arrange meetings at any time.

Surveys may be used to gather information and opinions from citizens that cannot attend meetings or to provide supplementary data.

PERFORMANCE REPORTS AND PUBLIC HEARINGS

A Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER) is completed each year at the end of the program year. The CAPER undergoes a 15-day public review period on the County Community Development Program website. A notification about the availability of the CAPER for public review and comments is published in the Burlington County Times. The notice informs interested citizens where they can obtain a copy for review and details when and how to submit comments.

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM PUBLIC HEARINGS

All public hearings are open to every citizen of Burlington County and are held in locations that are accessible to individuals with disabilities and reachable by public transportation.

At least 10 days' advance notice will be provided before each public hearing. The notice will contain the location, time, and a brief description of the hearing's purpose and agenda.

Public hearings are announced by:

- Placing a public notice in the Burlington County Times or another newspaper of general circulation in the area served by Burlington County.
- Placement of notice on the County's Community Development Program website.
- Accommodations are provided to help individuals with disabilities and language barriers fully engage in public hearings. This includes:
 - Groups of non-English speaking persons who need translations during meetings.
 - Individuals who use sign language require a sign language interpreter during meetings.
 - Individuals who are blind or have difficulty reading require assistance with public documents.

In the event a state of emergency is declared limiting public gatherings, the County may utilize virtual public hearings to provide residents with an opportunity to offer input.

Individuals needing assistance due to a handicap, disability, or language barrier to attend hearings or meetings may contact the Division of Community Development and Housing at 609-265-5072 to arrange accommodation. Requests for assistance must be made at least four (4) days in advance of the date assistance is required.

PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT ON THE DRAFT PLAN

A draft of each Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plan is available for public review on the Community Development Program's website. The Plan will also be accessible at the Office of Community Development and Housing. A 30-day comment period allows any county resident or interested organization to review and provide feedback on the draft Plan's contents.

A notice of availability for the 30-day public review and comment period is published in the Burlington County Times. This notice includes a summary of the Plan detailing its contents and purpose, a link to access the Plan, and instructions for submitting comments. Important information such as the time, date, and location of the public hearings is also included in the notice of availability.

Public Hearings

The Community Development planning process includes two public hearings to provide citizens ample opportunity to comment on the draft plan.

A public hearing is conducted during the plan's development to gather input and comments on community needs. The second public hearing takes place during the 30-day comment period following the draft Plan's publication on the County website.

Amendments to the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan

- Amendments to the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan are made through a Substantial Amendment process. An amendment is considered “substantial” when it involves adding an activity not previously described in the Plan.
- Deletion of an activity previously described in the Plan
- A change in an approved activity affecting the purpose, scope, location, or beneficiaries is defined as follows:
 - Purpose. Any change that would result in the activity not meeting its original purpose
 - Scope. An increase or decrease in the original budget activity by more than \$100,000.00
 - Location. A change in the location where the activity will be concentrated and its service area.

Municipalities requesting a significant change to an activity they intend to undertake must first advertise and hold a public hearing to allow residents to review and comment on the proposed change. The municipality’s public hearing shall be announced by publishing a 5-day advance notice in the local newspaper. A change description will be available for review during the 5 days and at the public hearing.

The County publishes a summary of the amendment in the Burlington County Times, announcing a 30-day public review and comment period. The notice includes details about when and how citizens can submit their comments, and it states that the complete amendment is available for review at the Community Development Program Office.

Consideration of Public Comments About Plans and Plan Revisions

Public comments are considered after the Consolidated Plan or amendments to the Plan are finalized. Comments received in writing during the comment periods or expressed at public hearings are summarized and attached to the final Plan or amendment. The summary also includes reasons for comments or views that are not accepted.

RECORDS AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC AND COMPLAINTS

Documents and Records Available to the Public

The Consolidated Housing and Community Development Plan, Annual Action Plans, Plan Amendments, and Performance Reports are accessible on the Community Development Program Office website for public review.

Copies of the Consolidated Plan and Performance Report are available at rates established by the Public Right to Know Law. Free copies are provided to groups representing low and moderate-income residents, low and moderate-income areas, and special needs populations.

Residents experiencing difficulties accessing documents should reach out to the Division Head at the

Burlington County Community Development Office, Human Services Facility, located at 795 Woodlane Road, Westampton, NJ 08060 (commdev@co.burlington.nj.us). communitydev@co.burlington.nj.us

Complaints

If any citizen or representative of a citizen group has complaints regarding the Consolidated Plan, Annual Plans, Amendments, or Performance Reports, they must submit their complaint in writing to the Community Development Program Division Head at the address provided above. The Division Head will respond in writing within 15 days of receiving the complaint to acknowledge and address it.

ANTI-DISPLACEMENT AND RELOCATION ASSISTANCE PLAN

Consistent with the goals and objectives of activities assisted under Section 104(d) of the Housing and Community Development Act, Burlington County will take the following steps to minimize the displacement of individuals from their homes: the County will not use funds provided under the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, as amended, to assist in activities that will result in the demolition or conversion of occupied or vacant-occupiable low and/or moderate-income dwellings to other uses.

If demolition or conversion for other uses becomes necessary due to unforeseen circumstances, the County will replace all occupied and vacant-occupiable low and/or moderate-income dwelling units that are demolished or converted to uses other than low and/or moderate-income housing, as a direct result of activities funded by the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, as amended, as outlined in 24 CFR 570.606(b)(1).

Requirements Before Demolition/Conversion

All replacement housing will be provided within three years or upon the commencement of demolition or rehabilitation related to conversion. Before obligating or expending funds that will directly lead to such demolition or conversion, the County will publicly disclose and submit to HUD the following information:

- A description of the proposed assisted activity
- The general location on a map and the approximate number of dwelling units categorized by size (number of bedrooms) that will be demolished or converted to uses other than low and/or moderate-income dwelling units as a direct result of the assisted activity.
- A timeline for the start of the demolition or conversion.
- The general location on a map and the approximate number of dwelling units by size (number of bedrooms) that will be provided as replacement units.
- The funding source and a schedule for providing replacement dwelling units.
- The basis for concluding that each replacement dwelling unit will remain a low and/or moderate-income dwelling unit for at least ten years from the date of initial occupancy.

The County will not use funds provided under the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, as amended, to assist or undertake any new activities beyond code enforcement that are expected to cause permanent displacement.

Relocation Assistance

If displacement becomes necessary due to unforeseen circumstances, the County will provide relocation assistance, as described in 24 CFR Part 570.606(b)(2), to each low and moderate-income household displaced by the demolition of housing or by the conversion of a low and moderate-income dwelling to another use as a direct result of assisted activities.