



2021-2025

Union County Citizen Participation Plan



Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	2
DEFINITIONS	3
PARTICIPATION.....	4
PUBLIC HEARINGS	5
ACCESS TO MEETINGS	5
PUBLIC COMMENT	6
AMENDMENTS.....	7
PERFORMANCE REPORTS.....	7
ACCESS TO PROGRAM INFORMATION	8
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE	9
COMPLAINTS	9
CORONAVIRUS AID, RELIEF AND ECONOMIC SECURITY ACT (CARES ACT)	10
TABLE A.....	11
TABLE B	12

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2021-2025 Union County Citizen Participation Plan Amendment #1

The 2021-2025 Union County Citizen Participation Plan is proposed to be amended to reflect a change in the use of CDBG funds for existing projects that currently result in a 20% increase or decrease of the total project budget. The percentage is proposed to increase from 20% to 50% in order to reduce the frequency of subjecting new projects to lengthy Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plan amendment processes, which have previously resulted in and are projected to result in significant delays in initiating new projects, thus hindering the County's ability to serve beneficiaries through eligible activities and spend CDBG funds in a timely manner.

INTRODUCTION

In compliance with 24 CFR 91.105, Union County is required to adopt a Citizen Participation Plan. Union County has designed this community wide Citizen Participation Plan to provide for and encourage resident participation in the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. This plan is an essential element of Union County's present and future community development process and has been developed to comply with the regulations and requirements of the CDBG program as administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

The Citizen Participation Plan sets forth the County's policies and administration for the CDBG entitlement program with respect to the following Consolidated Plan documents:

- Five-Year Consolidated Plan (Con Plan)
- Annual Action Plan (AAP)
- Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER)
- Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice (AI)

The primary goal of this Citizen Participation Plan is to provide all residents with adequate opportunities to participate in an advisory role in the planning, implementation, and assessment of the Union County CDBG Program. The plan sets forth policies and procedures for participation, which are designed to maximize the opportunity for resident participation in the community development process. Special emphasis has been placed on encouraging participation by persons of low- and moderate-incomes, residents of blighted neighborhoods, and residents of areas where community development funds are utilized.

Residents are encouraged to participate in all phases of the CDBG program(s) and will be provided full access to program information. However, final responsibility and authority for the development and implementation of CDBG program will lie with Union County.

DEFINITIONS

Annual Action Plan: This document updates the Consolidated Plan on an annual basis and allocates one (1) year's funding (entitlement and program income) to specific projects and activities for the CDBG programs.

CAPER (Consolidated Annual Performance Evaluation Report): This document reports on the progress made in carrying out the Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plans. Union County prepares the report annually in accordance with 24 CFR Part 91.105.

CDBG (Community Development Block Grant Program): A U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grant which provides for a variety of community development programs that benefit low- and moderate-income persons.

Citizen Participation Plan: The Citizen Participation Plan (CPP) sets forth Union County's policies and procedures for resident participation in the development of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program's goals and priorities. The CPP provides an opportunity for the community to work in partnership with the County to identify needs and to allocate CDBG funds.

Consolidated Plan: The document that is submitted to HUD and serves as the planning document for the jurisdiction and application for CDBG funding. The document is developed in accordance with 24 CFR Part 91 and sets forth the priorities/strategies of the programs for a five-year period.

Low- and Moderate-Income Persons: An individual from a household with a total income that does not exceed eighty percent (80%) of the median household income for the area (Union County) adjusted for family size. HUD calculates and publishes the income limits each year.

Program Year: The twelve (12) month period in which HUD funds are to be spent by the County for eligible activities; usually beginning July 1 and ending June 30.

Public Hearing: A formal opportunity for a governing body or other entity to receive public opinion on subjects that may require action. Notices of public hearings are advertised through various forms of media.

Subrecipient: A public or private nonprofit agency, authority or organization, or a for-profit entity or local governments receiving CDBG funds from the County or another subrecipient to undertake activities eligible for assistance. The term does not include contractors providing supplies, equipment, construction or services subject to the procurement requirements in 2 CFR Part 200, as applicable.

Substantial Amendment: A substantial amendment is a change to the jurisdiction's planned or actual activities as published in the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan. The County has established and published in the Citizen Participation Plan thresholds to define what constitutes a substantial amendment.

PARTICIPATION

The primary objectives of the HUD programs covered by this Citizen Participation Plan are to improve communities and neighborhoods by providing decent housing, a suitable living environment, and economic opportunities.

It is the policy of the County to encourage and facilitate the participation of all its residents, including minorities and non-English speaking persons, persons with disabilities in the planning processes for its HUD programs. The County also encourages the participation of service providers, government agencies, and others in the development of all HUD required consolidated planning documents including the Five-Year Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plans, Substantial Amendments, and the Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Reports (CAPER). They shall also make an effort to provide information to the Public Housing Authority (PHA) about activities related to the development of the consolidated plan so that the PHA can make this information available at the annual public hearing(s) required for the PHA Plan.

The primary purpose of the participation is to gather input for identifying community development needs, setting priorities, funding allocations, and program recommendations related to the consolidated planning process. Local officials will make every effort to involve residents in all phases of the development, implementation, and assessment of community development programs including, but not limited to, the following phases:

- A. Identification and assessment of housing and community development needs; determination of CDBG project(s) and documentation;
- B. Development of the Five-Year Consolidated Plan and the Annual Action Plan (AAP), which serves as the application for funding submitted to HUD annually;
- C. Development of the Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice (AI);
- D. Changes and/or amendments to approved CDBG projects or Consolidated Plan, AAP and/or AI; and,
- E. Assessment of CDBG program performance.

All phases of the community development process will be conducted by local officials in an open manner. Residents of Union County are encouraged to participate at all levels and will be given access to program information during each phase of any CDBG program as outlined herein.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

The County must conduct at least two (2) public hearings per year to obtain the views and comments of residents, service providers, government agencies, and other stakeholders regarding the County's CDBG funded programs. The hearings will be conducted at a minimum of two (2) different stages of the program year—at least one (1) of these hearings must be held prior to the adoption of the proposed Consolidated Plan and/or Annual Action Plan. The second public hearing will be conducted in conjunction with the preparation of the Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER) unless a public hearing was previously conducted during the program year for a different program component, such as a substantial amendment to the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan, to meet the minimum. The public hearings generally address housing and community development needs, development of proposed activities, and the review of program performance.

Residents must be given adequate notice of all hearings and meetings through advertisements in one of the County's adjudicated newspapers and/or other publications of general circulation, serving the community of affected residents. Public hearings will be advertised at least ten (10) days prior to the hearing date. Public notice shall indicate the date, time, place, and purpose of the hearing or meeting as well as disclose information that will contribute to the public's understanding of the issues to be discussed at the hearings. Notices may be published in alternate language as appropriate and will be accessible to those with disabilities. Meeting location and access is described below.

Additional public hearings beyond the minimum may be held as deemed necessary by Union County in order to inform residents of community development project(s) and activities, and to solicit resident opinions and comments. All additional hearings shall comply with the requirements set forth in this plan.

ACCESS TO MEETINGS

All public hearings will be held at times and locations which will be accessible to all residents, especially persons of low and moderate incomes, and residents of blighted neighborhoods and CDBG project areas. Local officials may take additional steps to further promote participation by such groups, or to target program information to these persons should officials feel that such persons may otherwise be excluded, or should additional action be deemed necessary. Activities to promote additional participation may include posting of notices in blighted neighborhoods and in places frequented by low- and moderate-income persons and holding public hearings in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods or areas of existing or proposed CDBG project activities.

Public hearings and meetings will be scheduled for convenient times as determined by Union County. Public hearings may be held at any site which, in the opinion of Union County, provides adequate access for resident participation.

The locations of all public hearings shall be made accessible to persons with disabilities. Union County shall provide a sign language interpreter whenever they are notified in advance that one or more hearing impaired persons will be in attendance. Union County shall provide a qualified reader whenever they are notified in advance that one or more visually impaired persons will be in attendance. Additionally, Union County shall provide reasonable accommodations whenever they are notified in advance that one or more persons with mobility or development disabilities will be in attendance.

Local officials will undertake all reasonable actions necessary to allow limited English proficiency residents to participate in the community development process. Such actions may include the provision of an interpreter and/or the provision of materials in the appropriate language or format for persons with Limited English Proficiency.

PUBLIC COMMENT

It is the policy of the County to provide residents, service providers, government agencies, and other stakeholders a sufficient time period (not less than thirty [30] days) to review and comment on proposed Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plans, and Substantial Amendments and not less than fifteen [15] days to review and comment on the Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Reports (CAPER). The County may publish a summary of the proposed Consolidated Plan in one or more newspapers of general circulation and make a copy of the full document available on the County’s website or for pick up at the County offices.

All public notices invite interested persons to submit comments. Contact information will be provided on all public notices, at public meetings, as well as on any of the documents or materials being considered. All comments will be reviewed and considered. Documents presented for approval by the Board of County Commissioners will include a summary of all comments received during the public comment and a summary of comments not accepted and the reasons, therefore.

The comment periods for plans and reports are listed below in the following table.

Plan/Report	Comment Period
Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plan	30 calendar days
Substantial Amendments to Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plan	30 calendar days

Analysis of Impediments	30 calendar days
Citizen Participation Plan	30 calendar days
Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER)	15 calendar days

AMENDMENTS

On occasion, it may be necessary for the County to process a “substantial amendment” to the Five-Year Consolidated Plan or an Annual Action Plan to allow for new CDBG funded activities, modification of existing activities, or other program administrative actions.

Any proposed amendment that is considered a “substantial amendment” is subject to the Residents Participation process, requires formal action from the Board of Commissioners, and approval by HUD. A notice will be published informing the public of a thirty (30) day comment period on the proposed substantial amendments. The County will consider all comments or views received from the public concerning proposed substantial amendments in accordance with 24 CFR Part 91.105(c)(3). A summary of these comments and views, including comments or views not accepted (and the reason why) shall be attached to the substantial amendment.

Union County is required by HUD [24 CFR Part 91.105(c)] to identify the criteria to be used in determining if a proposed action will be considered a Substantial Amendment. The following criteria will be used by the County—if any one criterion applies, a substantial amendment will be required:

1. A new activity not previously listed and described in the Consolidated Plan/Annual Action Plan;
2. Amending the description of an existing activity in such a way that the newly described purpose, scope, location, or beneficiaries differ significantly from the original activity’s purpose, scope, location, or beneficiaries;
3. The cancellation of an existing activity listed and described in the Consolidated Plan/Annual Action Plan;
4. Changes in the use of CDBG funds between existing projects that result in a 50% increase or decrease of the total project budget.

During the County’s administration of the HUD programs, it may become necessary to amend the Citizen Participation Plan. Any proposed amendment to the Citizen Participation Plan will be made available to the public for a thirty (30) day comment period and will require approval by the Board of County Commissioners and HUD.

PERFORMANCE REPORTS

Each fiscal year Union County is required to prepare and submit the Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER) to HUD for the previous program year. The information compiled in this document is necessary to assess the progress on funding received by the County and their subrecipients. Data collected in the compilation of the performance report will be used to supply information to HUD and the public on the accomplishments and services provided. The information on the report will include the number of people served, ethnicity, income category, objective and outcome, and type of service received.

Prior to submitting the CAPER to HUD, the final report will be available to residents for review and comment for a period of at least fifteen (15) days. Residents will be notified of the CAPER's availability through newspaper notification and email to interested parties for whom CDBG staff has an email address. The notification will be published the day the comment period begins for the CAPER. During the comment period, the CAPER will also be available on Union County's website at UnionCountyNC.gov/News and hard copies of the CAPER may be requested and sent by mail to all interested parties. All comments received in writing or orally at the public hearings will be considered. A summary of all resident or group comments along with a summary of those accepted and those not accepted, and the corresponding explanations will be included in the final CAPER.

ACCESS TO PROGRAM INFORMATION

The County shall provide opportunities for residents, public agencies, and other interested parties with reasonable and timely access to information and records relating to the jurisdiction's Consolidated Plan, as well as the proposed, actual, and past use of funds covered by this Citizen Participation Plan. Before the adoption of the Consolidated Plan, the County will make available to residents, public agencies, and other interested parties information that includes the amount of assistance the County expects to receive, the range of activities that may be undertaken, the estimated amount of funding that will benefit persons of low- and moderate-income, and the County's plans to minimize displacement of persons and to assist any persons displaced. The County shall make reasonable effort to assure that CDBG program information is available to all residents, especially those of low and moderate incomes and those residing in blighted or limited English proficiency neighborhoods and/or CDBG project areas.

Standard documents will be available for public review at the Union County Government Center at 500 N. Main St., Monroe, NC 28112 contact Clayton Voignier at 704.283.3687 or Clayton.voignier@unioncountync.gov. Copies can also be found on the County website at Union County. These documents will also be available in a form accessible to persons with disabilities upon request (this may include but is not necessarily limited to providing documents in Braille, electronic copies, or large print copies for the visually impaired). Information from CDBG

project files shall be made available for examination and duplication, on request, during regular business hours. Standard CDBG program information and materials will also be made available and distributed to the public at the regularly scheduled public hearings as outlined in this Plan. The County will also provide a reasonable number of free copies of the Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plans, Substantial Amendments, and the Citizen Participation Plan to residents and groups that request them.

Materials to be made available shall include, but are not necessarily limited to, the Citizen Participation Plan, records of public hearings, mailings and promotional materials, prior CDBG Annual Action Plan, grant agreements, the environmental review record, procurement records, project design and construction specifications, labor standards materials, performance evaluation reports, proposed and approved CDBG Annual Action Plan for the current year, written comments or complaints received concerning the community development program along with the written responses from Union County, and copies of the Federal and State rules, regulations, policies, requirements, and procedures governing the CDBG program.

In no case shall Union County disclose any information concerning the financial status of any program participant(s) which may be required to document program eligibility or benefit. Furthermore, the County shall not disclose any information which may, in the opinion of the County Manager, be deemed of a confidential nature.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Technical assistance is available as necessary to individual residents and resident organizations representative of persons of low- and moderate-income that request such assistance in developing proposals for funding assistance under the Consolidated Plan.

Technical assistance shall be provided on request and may include, but is not limited to: interpreting the CDBG program and its rules, regulations, procedures and/or requirements; providing information and/or materials concerning the CDBG program; and assisting low and moderate income residents, and residents of blighted neighborhoods to develop statements of views, identify their needs, and to develop activities and proposals for projects which, when implemented, will resolve those needs.

COMPLAINTS

Residents or other interested parties may submit complaints related to the County's Consolidated Plan, plan amendments, and performance reports. Complaints may be made in writing to Union County Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Coordinator ATTN: Patrick Niland at 500 N. Main St., Monroe, NC 28112. Union County will receive, log, and file all

written complaints and grievances. A letter responding to each complaint or grievance will be written and sent to the party or parties from whom the complaint or grievance was received.

The complaining party should state the nature of the complaint, what prior efforts have been made to resolve the problem and any other pertinent information which would help staff determine a solution. All complaints will receive careful consideration and a timely, substantive written response will be provided within fifteen (15) working days or as soon as possible otherwise.

Records of all comments, objections, and/or complaints by residents concerning Union County's CDBG program and subsequent action take in response to those comments shall be maintained on file at the Union County Government Center and shall be made available for public inspection upon request.

Residents may, at any time, contact HUD directly to register comments, objections, or complaints concerning Union County's AAP and/or CDBG projects. Residents are encouraged, however, to attempt to resolve any complaints at the local level as outlined above prior to contacting HUD.

All comments or complaints submitted to HUD shall be addressed in writing to:

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
ATTN: Community and Planning Development Division
Asheville Building
1500 Pinecroft Road, Suite 401
Greensboro, NC 27407

CORONAVIRUS AID, RELIEF AND ECONOMIC SECURITY ACT (CARES ACT)

Union County received additional Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act). The CARES Act funding is commonly referred to as CDBG-CV and is intended to prevent, prepare for, or respond to the coronavirus. The CARES Act provides flexibilities for Entitlement Communities to make it easier to use CDBG and CDBG-CV during Program Years 2019 and 2020. The CARES Act authorizes HUD to grant waivers and alternative requirements. This amendment to the Citizen Participation Plan addresses flexibilities in requirements for Citizen Participation and public hearings for 2019 and 2020 CDBG/CDBG-CV funding.

The CARES Act provides that grantees may amend citizen participation plans to establish expedited procedures to draft, propose, or amend consolidated and annual action plan. Expedited procedures include the following:

Public Comment:

The public comment period pertaining to amendments to the Citizen Participation Plan, Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plan(s), and Substantial Amendment(s), as they related to CDBG-CV, shall be a minimum of 5 days. During this time, the public will have an opportunity to submit comments orally, in writing, or via electronic methods, as directed in the notice. Comment periods for more than one of the above documents may run concurrently.

Public Hearings:

In-person public hearings are not required. Virtual public hearings are allowed under the following circumstances:

- 1) National/local health authorities recommend social distancing and limiting public gatherings for public health reasons.
- 2) Virtual hearings provide reasonable notification and access for citizens in accordance with the grantee’s certifications, timely responses from local officials to all citizen questions and issues, and public access to all questions and responses.

A formal notice of the public hearing will be published in at least one local newspaper with general circulation no less than two (2) days prior to the hearing. The same notice will be published on Union County’s website.

TABLE A

CDBG PUBLIC NOTICE SUMMARY				
Document	Public Hearing	Hearing Notice	Public Comment Period	Notices in Public Areas
Consolidated Plan and/or Annual Action Plan	1 to 2	Run and display notice in newspapers at least 10 calendar days prior to each public hearing or at the beginning of the comment period, whichever is first.	30 calendar days	Post notice listing all meetings and/or hearings for the planning and adoption phase with enough detail for the public to recognize the purposes of the meetings, draft

				document locations, and dates for comment periods.
Substantial Amendments	None	N/A	30 calendar days	Post notice describing amendment items and location of drafts for public review and comment.
Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER)	1*	Run and display notice in newspapers at least 10 calendar days prior to each public hearing or at the beginning of the comment period, whichever is first.	15 calendar days	Post notice identifying purpose of hearing, comment period, and location of drafts for public review and comment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Display ads will be published in one or more of the local newspapers in key publications in the affected areas. ➤ Documents and drafts for public comments will be available on the County’s website. <p>* Only conducted if a public hearing was not previously conducted during the program year for a different program component, such as a substantial amendment to the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan, or at the County’s discretion</p>				

TABLE B

SUMMARY OF SUBSTANTIAL AMENDMENT CRITERIA
1) Adding an activity not previously listed or described in the Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan.
2) Amending an existing activity so that the new purpose, scope, location, or beneficiaries differ significantly from the original activity.

3) The cancellation/deletion of an existing activity.

4) Major budget shifts between approved projects (+/- 50% of the total budget).