



HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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Director's Report

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DIRECTOR'S NOTE

April was an exciting month for the Department. Staff formed interview teams to review potential job candidates for 3 open positions in the department. After 3 weeks of interviews, the best qualified candidates were selected and decisions were forwarded to Human Resources for job offers. The Chief of Housing Opportunities Programs division candidate was promoted from within the department. The Fiscal Specialist II position was filled by an employee transferring from the County's finance department. The Administrative Aide position is a new hire for the County. All are scheduled to start in May/June. We are very excited to welcome them to our housing team!

I was invited to make a presentation at Leadership Howard County's event, Livable Communities, on April 25th at the Owen Brown Interfaith Center. The class participants were asked to consider how Housing, Health & Safety, Community Features, Social & Support Services, Transportation & Mobility, and Community Engagement each play a role in a Livable Community. The presentation was an opportunity to share the importance of affordable housing for residents of all income levels in a community and to provide information about the Department's programs that can help increase the rate of homeownership, encourage "Live Near Your Work", revitalize older neighborhoods and facilitate aging in place.

The FFY17 Annual Action Plan was submitted to the County Council in March. I testified before the Council at a public hearing on April 19, 2017. The annual action plan was approved on May 1, 2017.

County Executive Kittleman presented the FY18 operating budget to the County Council that evening. The FY18 budget includes a 5.6% increase over last year's budget, but maintains the County Executive's commitment to a lean, responsive and effective county government. The FY18 budget for the Department is \$6,595,374. This budget will allow us to continue funding our homeownership programs, fund a new rehabilitation loan program, and provide funds to 12 area non-profits to serve low income households. The final vote on the budget is set for May 24, 2017.

The Department sponsored a "Live Near Your Work Lunch & Learn" event for County employees on April 20th from 12 pm – 1 pm at the George Howard building. Staff presented information about the programs available through the Department for employees to rent or buy a home in Howard County. The event was well attended and staff is planning to schedule a similar event in the future.

Kelly Cimino, Director

HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAMS

MODERATE INCOME HOUSING UNIT PROGRAM

Please see the attached MIHU Report.

SETTLEMENT DOWNPAYMENT LOAN PROGRAM

As of March 31, 2017, funding for the FY 2017 Settlement Downpayment Loan Program has been exhausted. Due to an increase in demand, these funds were depleted earlier this year than in previous years. Funding for FY18 will be available after July 1, 2017.

There were a few loans approved in March that closed in April. For FY17, 34 MIHU buyers received SDLP loans, including 13 Workforce Initiatives loans, for a total of \$817,215. The Department also set aside \$400,000 to help working families to buy non-MIHU homes in Howard County. For FY17, 33 non-MIHU buyers received loans to assist with closing costs for a total of \$438,528. In past years, funds in the program were only available to households purchasing properties through the County's Moderate Income Housing Unit (MIHU) program.

NEIGHBORHOOD STABILIZATION PROGRAM (NSP)

The NSP program focused on purchasing foreclosures in zip codes 21045 (East Columbia) and 20723 (North Laurel) to help stabilize those areas. All four of the homes purchased with the grant funds have been renovated and resold. Program income from the sale of the previous homes was used to purchase a fifth property. Rehab of the 5th property is complete. The Commission requested assistance from the Department to sell this home to an income-eligible household. The Department awarded the unit through a lottery in April 2017. A contract has been signed by the buyers. The contract is pending signature by the Housing Commission. Tentative settlement date is June 30, 2017. The NSP grant will be closed out once the last home is sold. Any proceeds from the sale of the home will be returned to the State as program income.

MARYLAND HOUSING REHABILITATION PROGRAM

The Maryland Housing Rehabilitation Program (MHRP) can be used to assist eligible homeowners secure low interest loans to make home repairs and bring properties into compliance with applicable building codes and standards. The program is designed to benefit households with incomes that are at or below 80% of the statewide median income. Applications are available by phone, mail and online. Homeowners must be current on their mortgage, insurance and property tax payments to be eligible for the program.

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND GRANTS

Congress Reaches Omnibus Agreement for FY 2017 Spending

On May 1st, the House and Senate released the text for a \$1 trillion omnibus spending bill that would fund the government for the rest of the fiscal year. The omnibus package, that includes 11 unfinished FY 17 appropriations bills, was drafted to appease both sides of the aisle and will likely be signed into law prior to the end of the week-long continuing resolution deadline on May 5th.

The bill includes level funding for many U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development programs, including \$3 billion for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, \$950 for the HOME Investment Partnerships (HOME) program, and \$300 million in Section 108 Loan Guarantee authority. The Homeless Housing Assistance grants received a slight increase to \$2.38 billion with \$310 for the Emergency Solutions Grant program—up from \$2.1 billion and \$250 million in FY2016 respectively.

Other programs receiving slight funding increases were the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative, Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA), Section 202 Housing for the Elderly, and Lead-Based Paint Hazard Reductions. The Section 811 Housing for Persons with Disabilities program saw a funding cut, however. Overall, the FY 17 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development (THUD) Appropriations Bill appropriates \$38.82 billion for HUD, a \$512.5 million increase over the enacted levels in FY 16.

FFY2017 Annual Action Plan

Howard County has completed the Annual Action Plan process and remains in a holding pattern until HUD officially releases the FY2017 CDBG and HOME allocation amounts. Given that Congress passed level funding for both programs, we do not anticipate a reduction in the amounts the County will receive. But we must wait for official notification from HUD before submitting the County's final application for the upcoming program year that begins July 1, 2017.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CDBG) PROGRAM

The Division focused on two (2) important objectives in April. The first was the continuing approval process for the FFY2107 Action Plan in which the Division submitted the Action Plan to the County Council, met with the Council to discuss the Plan and held two (2) Public Hearings. The first Public Hearing was held at the Housing and Community Development Board meeting on April 13th. The Plan was approved to move forward. The second Public Hearing was held during the County Council's regular Public Hearing on April 19th. No written or stated public testimony regarding the Action Plan was received at either hearing.

The Second objective in April was the 3rd Quarter Reporting submissions for CDBG. These submissions were collected from April 7-April 24th. Reporting submissions are attached to fund requests by the sub-recipients. The 3rd Quarter Reporting has been completed.

The Division met with the Landlord Engagement Staff at Bridges to Housing Stability. Bridges presented their efforts, including a professional outreach video, that impressed those in attendance.

The Grants Specialist and Director Cimino attended a formal budget review of Current Year Financial Management for the Department on April 20th. The changes requested by the Finance Department have been completed.

HOME INVESTMENT PARTNERSHIP (HOME) PROGRAM

HOME Program Specialist worked to finalize the second iHomes' acquisition. The project is essentially "complete" now as the beneficiary data has been entered into IDIS. Two income-eligible applicants have moved into the home and the initial rents have been verified for compliance with the HOME program rents.

In January, the HOME Program Interim Rule became final and HUD has been offering several on-line training courses. The HOME Program Specialist attended a two-day webinar that highlighted the changes in IDIS regarding reporting tools, tracking compliance, and receipting and spending program income. Howard County intends to fully incorporate these changes in the upcoming program year.

Lastly, in April, the County's homebuyer assistance program related to the Cottages at Greenwood was monitored for the first time. It was noted that one household is considering moving. In order to maintain compliance with the terms of the grant agreement, the accessible and affordable unit will be offered for sale to another income-eligible household.

COUNTY FUNDED PROJECTS

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING/DAY RESOURCE CENTER

The Leola Dorsey Community Resource Center on Guilford Road in Jessup is 72% complete and is expected to open in August 2017. The project is owned by the Housing Commission and will be operated by Volunteers of America. Once completed, the three-story center will provide services three days a week by Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center. The Center will assist homeless individuals by offering access to meals, showers, laundry, email, and visits to the center's pantry to receive donated necessities. Medical, counseling and social services will also be made available.

RIVERWATCH

The Housing Commission received a donation of land in Elkridge as part of an MIHU alternative compliance plan. The developer of Annapolis Junction Town Center project in Savage transferred 31 MIHUs to this project. The 84-unit, mixed income rental townhouse community is complete and all of the units are leased.

ACQUISITION/REHAB PROGRAM

The Department's FY17 budget includes funds for the acquisition and rehabilitation of existing scattered site properties. The Housing Commission entered into a Master Lease Agreement with Bridges to Housing Stability, Inc., a local non-profit housing agency, to use some of these funds to provide much-needed permanent supportive housing for the community. As of April 30th, the Housing Commission has purchased, renovated, and leased 13 condos to Bridges for this program. These units have been turned over to Bridges for rental to households earning up to 60% of Howard County area median income.

OUTREACH

HOMEBUYER EDUCATION WORKSHOP

This month's Homebuyer Education Workshop was held on Monday, April 17, 2017. The next workshop is scheduled for Monday, May 15, 2017, from 6-9 p.m., at the Columbia Gateway building. Pre-registration is required. The Department's website provides ongoing workshop dates through 2017 and FAQs. Call 410-313-6328 for more information.

MIHU WORKSHOP

April was an open enrollment month for the MIHU homeownership program. An MIHU Renters Information Workshop was held on April 19th at the Columbia Gateway building. The Homebuyers Information Workshop was held on April 20th at the George Howard building. Separating the workshops into one for potential renters and one for potential homebuyers was well received by those in attendance. Staff is available to partner with builders and nonprofits to present MIHU workshops throughout the year. Interested partners or applicants should visit our website or call 410-313-6343 for more information.

Attachment: MIHU Report
