

Comments prepared for presentation to the
Community Development Block Grant Commission
Public Hearing
March 5, 2009

Good afternoon. I am Alan Sweet, a resident of Madison (District 3). I am privileged to serve as the chair of the City's Community Services Commission. While my fellow commissioners have endorsed much of what I am about to propose, my comments today are solely my own.

I have served for more than two years on the Community Services Commission and have been struck by the level of commitment, dare I say passion, of those with whom I serve, along with those on our companion boards, the Early Childhood Care and Education Board and the Senior Citizens Advisory Committee. I would be remiss if I did not highlight the excellent work of the staff of the Office of Community Services as well. Over these two years, I have also learned much about the outstanding work of the Community Development Block Grant Commission and the CDBG Office. The citizens of the City of Madison, particularly those who are most in need, are being very well served by the efforts of all those involved in these programs.

I would like to focus my brief comments on one area of opportunity for the near future that I believe deserves strong consideration. It is time for the two commissions, along with the staff involved, to explore the many possible ways in which we might better coordinate our efforts. In these times of shrinking budgets, high unemployment rates, a major housing downturn, a growing population of families and individuals in unprecedented desperate need, in other words a generally dismal and bleak economic state, we in city government should be obliged to consider any opportunities for initiating operational efficiencies, particularly by leveraging federal, state, and city funding whenever possible. Certainly, the advent of Economic Stimulus funds reaching our city intensifies the need for the two commissions to work more closely together.

This closer degree of coordination could begin by including some or all of the following actions:

- Share commission meeting agendas and minutes, a move which is already underway;
- Hold occasional combined commission meetings as appropriate;
- In establishing or amending its own priorities and goals, consider those of the other commission;
- Ensure policies enacted by one commission are compatible, and definitely not in conflict, with the other;
- Explore a higher degree of coordination between procedures and timelines for making funding decisions;
- Minimize any duplications of reporting requirements of funded agencies relating to financial operations, performance data, program outcomes, etc.;
- Cross-train program staff and, whenever site visits are scheduled, possibly include information gathering for other program areas.

The Community Services Commission has held at least two discussions about an improved level of cooperation and coordination between our operations and those of the CDBG, and has endorsed the concept and encouraged its pursuit. To that end, Community Development Director Bill Clingan, CDBG Chairman Charlie Sanders, and myself have initiated regular meetings to share information and explore ways in which the two commissions may begin to integrate program priorities, goals, funding, and service delivery. There is no question that the populations we serve already overlap to a significant degree. It is now time to focus attention on that overlap in order to better serve those whose economic and social well-being depends on us.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you.

Alan Sweet

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