



CUMBERLAND COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

STAFF REPORT

From: Kristin Styles, Community Development Director

Date: June 5, 2020

Subject: Current Work Environment for the Community Development Office

In mid-March the Community Development Office started working remotely at the direction of the County Manager. This was a fairly easy transition for our office because we have placed all of our files on Google Drive and access them through Google Stream. We exclusively use Google Drive as our electronic filing system. This allows us to pull up any document, (word, excel, or otherwise), through a laptop, phone or tablet. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, this was essential tool for us due to the amount of required county-wide travel. Additionally, all reporting to HUD is done through HUD's IDIS and HEROS online systems, so no change occurred.

Switching from face-to-face meetings, to zoom or google hang outs, was a bit challenging for some of our subrecipients and contractors, but as the stay at home orders continued, the familiarity of video calls became easier. HUD has place temporary waivers on certain aspects of the CDBG program. We are no longer inspecting job sites and conducting face-to-face Prevailing Wages interviews with construction workers. This will be changing shortly, but staff are confident that we can conduct the interviews and inspections in a safe manner.

The two main challenges facing the Community Development office have nothing to do with the physical location of where we work. The first challenge is lack of childcare. Both staff members have young children who were attending full time childcare before the pandemic. With childcare facilities closed, or operating at 50% capacity, it has been a daily battle to coordinate work schedules between two working parents, while trying to find childcare coverage through babysitters and grandparents. This challenge isn't unique to our department, and we are aware that everyone with small children is in the same situation.

The second challenge facing our office is the workload. The Covid-19 pandemic had a drastic effect on almost every one of our 52 open projects. Many projects required amendments to their contracts, extensions of deadlines, and multiple meetings to coordinate all of the changes. The timeline of this also coincided with Quarter 3 reports and invoicing during the month of April. And, coincided with the submission of our Annual Action Plan to HUD in May.

Additionally, the County received \$920,165 in CARES Act funds for CDBG-Coronavirus relief. This required the creation, release, review, and approval of a CDBG-CV application and subsequent awards. This means our office is now managing 52 open projects, while preparing all of the

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required documentation (environmental reviews, contracts, reporting forms, client applications, etc) for an additional 41 projects through FY20-CDBG and CDBG-CV funds. We are working at an unsustainable rate. The staff are doing our best to address the biggest issues first, and get to the smaller ones before they become major issues. Many of our subrecipients are facing similar workloads and challenges within their organizations.

Both staff members are employed at 32 hours a week, yet have been working significantly more hours for the past two and a half months. Staff have budgeted 40 hours a week (32 through CDBG and 8 through CDBG-CV) starting upon the HUD approval of the CDBG-CV grant. While bringing on an addition part-time staff to manage some of the workload would be helpful, the CDBG-CV funds are only available for 1 year and the effort to train someone in such a regulatory specific program would be more work than its worth.

Moving forward, our office would like to continue to have the ability to limit our exposure by working remotely when possible and using safety precautions when working in the courthouse or returning to job sites. We plan to continue to work whatever hours are needed to get our jobs done, and done correctly. Over the next year, there will be certain weeks that staff will need to work significant more than 40 hours in a week. There will be other weeks where some level of normalcy might occur. Our goal remains keeping the CDBG, CDBG-CV, and HOME programs running as smoothly as possible.