

# BANGOR DAILY NEWS

## Bangor seeks public input on where to spend shrinking federal funds

By Evan Belanger, BDN Staff

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BANGOR, Maine — Faced with a continued decline in federal funding, Bangor city officials are preparing to formalize their [Community Development Block Grant](#) priorities for the next five years.

A program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development designed to fight blight and poverty, CDBG provides annual grants to qualifying cities like Bangor to help develop urban communities through decent housing and neighborhoods and expanded economic opportunities for low- and moderate-income residents.

But Bangor's annual allocation from CDBG, like that of other cities, is on the decline, falling 17 percent since fiscal 2012 from \$936,996 to a projected \$778,778 in fiscal 2016. City officials say the funding drawdown is affecting local projects and programs.

"It means that we can make far fewer investments," said Bangor Economic Development Officer Jason Bird. "We are hindered in the impact we can have on people's lives."

Historically, the city has used CDBG for a host of projects, including street and sidewalk renovations in low-income areas, parks and recreation improvement in low-income areas, housing rehabilitation, funding for senior citizen programs, business investments to create jobs for low- to moderate-income residents, and even commercial [facade improvements to attract businesses and jobs downtown](#).

According to Bird, the need is great compared to the funding available. The city could spend its entire allotment just repairing streets and sidewalks in low-income areas — though it does not — he said.

"If not for this program, there are dozens and dozens of families throughout the city that would be forced to move out," he said. "Properties would be languishing; they would be in further disrepair."

As a condition of accepting the annual grant, the city must submit to HUD a five-year strategic plan, detailing generally how it plans to use the money. As part of that process, the city is seeking public input to identify eligible activities that may be funded.

Public input can be presented in person during a public meeting at 5:15 p.m. May 5 at Bangor City Hall or through the city's Community and Economic Development office at 992-4240 or [comm.dev@bangormaine.gov](mailto:comm.dev@bangormaine.gov).

The strategic plan is due to HUD by May 15 for the 2016 federal fiscal year, which begins July 1. While it has not been finalized, city officials are already contemplating ideas to help stretch the

waning federal dollars.

Bird said the city will likely always have the housing rehab program, which helps fix blighted properties for low- and moderate-income residents, allowing them to stay in their homes. He also said though that the city could direct a greater percentage of its funding to nonprofit partners that provide eligible services across the city. He proposed a “competitive request for proposals” in which nonprofits would apply for CDBG funds to help meet specific community needs.

Working with nonprofits helps leverage the city’s CDBG money since those grants are usually matched with organizational funds, increasing the number and scope of projects that can be completed.

Often, Bird said, a small injection of CDBG money from the city is enough to make a community partner’s project happen when it otherwise wouldn’t.

While Bird said the city doesn’t know yet which nonprofits it will work with in the coming fiscal year, the city has used CDBG money in the past to work with groups like [Community Housing of Maine](#).

The organization requested last month \$50,000 in CDBG money from the current fiscal year to renovate a vacant four-unit housing development on Fourth Street, which it plans to make Section 8 housing.

The entity has completed similar projects at 53 Charles Street and 76 Pier Street in Bangor. Community Housing of Maine Executive Director Cullen Ryan called CDBG “a huge part of our mission.”

“It ends up being a gap filler that for us is the difference between a project getting done or not getting done,” he said.

The nonprofit provides housing for homeless and special-needs residents across the state.

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