

Skagit County Consortium
HOME Investment Partnerships Program
Citizen Participation Plan

October 2018

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Introduction

Purpose

Skagit County, as lead agency for the Skagit County Home Consortium, is required to develop and execute a Citizen Participation Plan to drive a process for soliciting and considering comment and consult from citizens and other stakeholders or interested parties located within the Consortium jurisdictions. The Citizen Participation Plan is key to assuring that the Consortium consider or incorporate needs and ideas important to the communities that the Consortium serves.

Federal law requires and the Consortium is committed to encouraging public participation of all affected parties, particularly emphasizing participation by individuals of low- and moderate-income, as well as persons who are members of minority groups, who do not speak English, and persons with disabilities. For purposes of Consortium activities, low- and moderate-income persons are defined as those with incomes at 80%, 50%, and 30% of area median income as published by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.

This document lays out how the Consortium intends to optimize public participation in the planning processes supporting several critical Consortium activities.

Consortium Overview

The Skagit County HOME Consortium was established in 2015 to obtain HOME Funding from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The Consortium includes Skagit, Island, and Whatcom Counties and 16 area cities and towns¹.

The primary purpose of the Consortium's HOME funds is to develop affordable housing for households with incomes between 30 and 80 percent of Area Median Income (AMI) and ensure housing is financially accessible for households experiencing homelessness with incomes less than 50% AMI.

As a grantee that receives HOME funding to benefit residents of Skagit, Island, and Whatcom counties, the Consortium values public participation and citizen involvement as a means to better align program goals and objectives with public interests.

The Consortium is committed to transparency and to pursuing activities that will benefit members of the community. This Citizen Participation Plan has been developed to facilitate citizen involvement.

Required Consortium Documents

The Consortium publishes several documents and encourages interested parties to provide comment and consultation.

Citizen Participation Plan: The law requires that recipients of HOME Investment Partnership funds lay out the policies and procedures that will encourage and guide citizen participation, with particular emphasis on low- and moderate-income persons, residents of blighted areas, persons with disabilities, non-English speaking persons, and residents of public housing and other low-income areas targeted for revitalization. The Citizen Participation Plan outlines how

¹ The participating municipalities include: Island County: Oak Harbor, Langley, Coupeville; Skagit County: Anacortes, Mount Vernon, Burlington, Hamilton, Concrete, Lyman, La Conner; Whatcom County: Ferndale, Lynden, Sumas, Blaine, Everson, Nooksack. Skagit County has been designated as the lead entity for the Consortium.

the Consortium publishes plan documents, receives and addresses comments, and incorporates public input into the final documents.

Tri-County Consolidated Plan: The Tri-County Consolidated Plan is designed and intended to satisfy the statutory requirements for the Skagit County HOME Consortium and its participating jurisdictions to receive funding allocations from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Community Development Block Grant program. Consolidated Plans serve several functions including as a planning document, a submission for federal funds, a strategy document that serves to guide the implementation of federal programs, and a management tool for assessing jurisdiction performance.

The plan covers a multi-year period. In addition to citizen and other stakeholder input, the Consolidated Plan includes a needs assessment, a housing market analysis, a strategic plan, and a first-year Action Plan. The first Consolidated Plan describes objectives and intended outcomes related to increasing the supply of affordable rental housing through tenant-based rental assistance (TBRA) and increasing the supply of affordable owner-occupied housing through direct financial assistance to low-income buyers.

Skagit County will make copies of the Consolidated Plan available to the public at least 30 days prior to the scheduled public hearing and will provide for not less than 30 days to receive comment from the public and interested parties. Comment will be received in writing or orally at scheduled hearings.

Annual Action Plan: The Annual Action Plan is a component of the Consolidated Plan. It is designed and intended to satisfy statutory requirements for the Skagit County HOME Consortium and its participating jurisdictions to receive funding allocations from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) through the HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) and the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG). HOME funding is designed to help participating jurisdictions implement local housing strategies designed to increase the supply of decent, affordable housing for low- and very low-income households.

Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER): The Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report is designed to demonstrate the jurisdiction's progress in achieving the goals and objectives outlined in the Tri-County Consolidated Plan and the Annual Action Plan.

Skagit County will make copies of the CAPER available to the public for comment for no less than 15 days prior to submission of the final CAPER to HUD.

Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice (AI): The Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice describes and identifies challenges affecting the availability of and access to fair housing within the Consortium area. Impediments to fair housing may include actions or issues that have the effect of restricting access to housing based upon members' protected status including race, color, religion, national origin, sex, familial status, mental or physical disability, source of income, marital status, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Substantial Amendments to Plan Documents

From time to time, it may be necessary to amend plan documents to accommodate changes in priorities, goals, funding, or other factors that affect how HOME funding will be used throughout the Consortium area. When substantial amendments are required, the Consortium will solicit additional public comment. Notice of such additional public comment may be published in the newspaper, online, via printed flyers, or by direct communication using electronic means, in alignment with the Public Notice section of this Citizen Participation Plan.

A Substantial Amendment, requiring a 30-day public comment period, includes the following:

- Changes to goals, policies, or procedures identified in the Consolidated Plan
- Changes reflecting a new activity
- In an approved Action Plan, changes to the funding level of an activity in excess of \$250,000
- In an approved Action Plan, changes to the funding level of a project in excess of \$150,000
- Major changes in the purpose, scope, beneficiaries, target populations, or location of a project in an approved Action Plan
- Cancellation of an existing project or addition of a new project in an approved Action Plan, except for substitution of an identified contingency project for one that cannot move forward

Changes that are not considered Substantial Amendments include:

- Data updates such as census information, income limits, fair market rents, HOME high and low market rents, HOME subsidy limits, and similar types of data shall not be considered a substantial amendment;
- Minor change in project location - A minor change in location on a specific property is not considered a substantial change as long as the purpose, scope, and intended beneficiaries remain essentially the same
- Project Budget Line Item change - The transfer of some (but not all) funds within a project from one approved budget line item to another approved budget line item (e.g., construction rather than engineering) does not constitute a substantial change

Citizen Participation

Citizen and Interested Party Comment and Consult is Valuable

The funding provided to the Consortium by HUD is intended to benefit the public by helping to improve the availability of decent, affordable housing in a suitable environment that supports economic opportunity for persons of low- and moderate-income.

In order to optimize the Consortium's effectiveness in utilizing HUD funding, it is necessary to solicit and understand the needs of residents who are at the center of the Consortium's mission. In addition to residents of low- and moderate-income, the Consortium seeks to establish partnerships with a variety of stakeholders and interested parties including nonprofit organizations who work directly with affected populations, community development organizations, regional government associations, foundations, businesses, emergency management agencies, agencies involved in the management of flood prone areas or public lands, broadband stakeholders that include public and private organizations including broadband internet service providers and organizations engaged in narrowing the digital divide, Community/Disaster Resiliency stakeholders including agencies whose primary responsibilities include

the management of flood prone areas, public land, or water resources, and emergency management agencies, and many other individuals and organizations with an interest in the Consortium's efforts to improve housing in the Consortium's jurisdiction.

Citizens and Interested Parties Are Encouraged to Participate in the Process

The following sections will outline the steps that the Consortium will undertake to encourage members of the public to engage with Consortium staff and contribute to the planning process. The Consortium endeavors to make participation simple by making planning materials undergoing review available and accessible to citizens and other stakeholders.

Parties Throughout the Region Are Encouraged to Participate

The Consortium provides funds for housing activities across three counties and is committed to providing opportunities for residents of all three counties to participate. In coordination with local agencies and service organizations, the Consortium will provide opportunities for residents to attend local hearings and meetings, and to provide comment and consultation within a reasonable distance from home.

Public Notice

Method and Timing

The Consortium is both committed and required to engage in public notice and allow for public comment periods for the plan documents described in the Introduction to this Citizen Participation Plan. Notice of public hearings is published in the Skagit County Herald. As additional technical systems become available, it is the intention of the Consortium to begin providing notice in digital form including on the Skagit County official web site and via e-mail delivery. When planning additional meetings throughout the Consortium area, notice may be published in printed publications, electronically on the County web site, or through flyers or other documents provided to local service providers and agencies.

In all cases where a public hearing is to be held, the Consortium will publish notice of intent to hold a public hearing no less than 15 days in advance of the public hearing, excluding the date of the hearing or close of the public comment period. Where a public hearing is not required or feasible, the Consortium will make every effort to publicize the public comment period or other meeting as soon as practical. The Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plan will be available for not less than a 30-day public comment period.

Public Access to Documents

All documents will be available at 700 S Second Street Room 301, Mount Vernon, WA, 98273 by the date published in the public notice and may be available in digital form upon request. Details about the dates of availability and any other distribution issues will be included in each public notice. Citizens and all interested parties may inquire about additional details by contacting the Housing, Homeless Services & Community Development Division of Skagit County Public Health at 360-416-1500.

Public Hearings, Public Meetings, and Other Forms of Public Participation

Public Hearings

Hearings scheduled to take place in front of the Skagit County Board of Commissioners will generally be held in the Commissioners' Hearing Room in the County Administration Building, 1800 Continental

Place, Mount Vernon, Washington. The precise time and location of public hearings will be included in the public notice published no later than two weeks prior to the hearing. The public is also welcome to review Skagit County Board of Commissioners agendas for information about public hearings by reviewing the agenda published on the County's web site at <http://inside.skagit.local/Departments/CountyCommissioners/main.htm> .

The Commissioners' Hearing Room of the County Administration Building is handicap accessible. Additional arrangements to reasonably accommodate special needs, including handicap accessibility or interpreter services, will be made upon receiving three-day advance notice.

Public Meetings

In order to maximize the public's opportunity to provide direct comment to published documents or to participate in community-based meetings addressing Consortium activities and plans, a public meeting may be organized in addition to public hearings. The Consortium will announce the time and location of such meetings no less than fifteen days in advance of the public meeting. Notice about public meetings may be published in the Skagit Valley Herald, on the Skagit County official web site, or communicated directly to key stakeholders or targeted outreach populations. The Consortium will make an effort to engage the public, marginalized populations, as well as potential program beneficiaries in planning activities. In order to facilitate this, public meetings will be advertised broadly and held during evening hours to maximize participation. In order to maximize outreach to individuals and organizations with a particular interest in housing and homelessness in the Consortium area, the County may also communicate with public and private service agencies and other organizations who work with low- and moderate-income residents about public meetings and opportunities for interested parties to provide input about Consortium activities.

Other Forms of Public Participation

The Consortium recognizes that interested parties may face challenges in attending public events, regardless of time and location. In order to enhance inclusion, the Consortium will seek public input about Consortium documents and other Consortium priorities by leveraging web-based tools such as online surveys, and monitoring new modalities for outreach as they emerge.

The Importance of Inclusion and Diversity

Because the Consortium includes such a large geographical area, demographic trends will be monitored so that outreach and materials will include steps to specifically address emerging populations and accommodate the language needs of non-English-speaking residents.

Public Comment

How to Submit Public Comment

Written comments may be submitted prior to public hearings or any time during the designated public comment period. Send comments to the Skagit County HOME Program Manager, Skagit County Department of Public Health, 700 S. Second Street Room 301, Mount Vernon, WA 98273, or kaylasb@co.skagit.wa.gov.

Comments presented during the course of a public hearing or public meeting will be documented and included in the citizen participation sections of all required documents.

Consortium Response to Public Comment

All comments collected by the Consortium will be included in Consortium plan documents along with a response regarding how the Consortium incorporated the comments in the final document or an explanation about why the comment did not result in a change to the final document.

Public Complaints or Grievances

The Consortium will respond to complaints about the Consortium planning documents or procedure, in writing, within 15 working days, where practicable. Complaints and grievances about Consortium planning documents or the planning process should be submitted to the Skagit County HOME Program Manager, Skagit County Department of Public Health, 700 S. Second Street Room 301, Mount Vernon, WA 98273, or kaylasb@co.skagit.wa.gov.

Discouraging Displacement

Though the Consortium endeavors to improve or increase the availability of safe, affordable housing, should Consortium activities lead to the residential displacement of individuals, the Consortium will develop a relocation plan for the activity in accordance with federal regulations. The County and Consortium will comply with the anti-displacement and relocation requirements of the Uniform Relocation Act and the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 and the implementing regulations of 24 CFR Part 42.

Technical Assistance

County and Consortium staff will provide technical assistance to individuals and interested parties who would like to submit a proposal to obtain funding for an activity included in Consortium planning documents. Individuals and interested parties are encouraged to contact staff by contacting the Housing, Homeless Services & Community Development Division of Skagit County Public Health at 360-416-1500.