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**SOUTHEAST NEBRASKA DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT  
PUBLIC INPUT MEETING REPORT -- ACTIVITIES SUPPORTING THE 2005-2009 NEBRASKA  
CONSOLIDATED PLAN**

**DED CONTRACT #04-03-142**

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## Introduction

The Southeast Nebraska Development District was retained in April, 2004 by the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED) for services in conducting public meetings and reporting activities relative to housing, homelessness, community and economic development within 18 counties in southeast Nebraska. Contract activities were for information assembly and reporting for purposes of the 2005-2009 Nebraska Consolidated Plan. The agreement is referenced as DED Contract #04-03-142.

The information contained herein was derived through input at four public meetings, each of which was located within a quadrant of the 18 county area of southeast Nebraska. Notifications of the meetings and opportunities to comment were accomplished via several means; each notice included the dates, times and locations for all planned public meetings. The attachments to this report provide evidence of the aforementioned activities and information assembled.

- > A public meeting notice was placed with one newspaper of general circulation in each of the 18 counties.
- > News releases were prepared and distributed to all significant media outlets serving the 18 county area.
- > Individual notices of the meetings were mailed to a select group including, chief elected official and clerk of each municipality; city administrators/managers; the chairperson of the county board and county clerk; chamber of commerce executives; community action agencies; and, professional economic development directors.
- > In addition, regional homeless service providers were included in the public meeting notifications. Contacts were identified with the assistance of Betty Medinger and Jean Chicoine at the Nebraska Health and Human Services System.

All meeting sites were held at public facilities that were fully handicapped accessible. Meeting facilitators utilized the "Facilitation Guide for Public Input Meetings" (Exhibit C) in conducting the public meetings. Each meeting was tape recorded for accuracy of reporting comments. Meeting materials available included a sign-in sheet, agenda, and a summary of programs encompassed by the 2005-2009 Nebraska Consolidated Plan. The schedule and locations of these meetings were: May 6th - City of Weeping Water; May 13th - City of Tecumseh; May 18th - City of Seward; and May 20th - City of Geneva.

Public notices included the notification that interpreters would be made available upon advance notification of the need. Notices included the notification that written comments would be accepted by SENDD through May 31, 2004. Written comments were received from two interested parties; their comments are incorporated into the compiled written record from the public input meetings.

A copy of this report will be placed on the Southeast Nebraska Network's website to allow for review by meeting participants and the public at large. The website URL is: <http://www.senebraska.org>.

## Organization of Report

The remainder of this report is organized into two sections with accompanying attachments. Each section is adapted from the Request for Proposal and Contract between DED and the Southeast Nebraska Development District.

Section I is SENDD's analysis and summary of the comments received through the public input meeting process. This encompasses the compiled flip chart records and written comments received on each of the seven priorities set out in DED's Public Input Facilitation Guide. Section II consists of SENDD's recommendations to the Nebraska Department Economic Development for consideration as they identify the state's needs, strategies and action plans relative to housing, homelessness, community and economic development and develop their five-year and annual action plans.

## Section I

### <> The Housing Priority

Participants at all four area meeting had utilized various funds for housing activities. Interested parties represented ED professionals, housing developers and consultants, non-profit agencies, business sector, towns, counties, community developers and private citizens. Individual responses from all four meetings were compiled (these are included as an attachment), examined by the author and distilled into summary statements. These statements are presented as bullet points in the next column.

The first public input item was the housing priority for DED to increase housing production to ensure an adequate, appropriate and affordable housing supply to meet community economic development needs. Participants were asked: Are you and your clients better off now than last year relative to the goal to produce more affordable housing. Participants are concerned about each program's ability and flexibility to serve the rural market (and clients) and stability of housing activity funding. They believe the programs are achieving improved housing outcomes through partnerships, building awareness and capacity, addressing identified needs and providing funding opportunities for local projects.

Cooperation on all levels receives mixed reviews. DED is more aware of barriers to affordable housing in rural areas and has facilitated local partnerships. However, state programs lack continuity, mandate housing services which impose costs, and program funding doesn't forward local priorities. On the local level, there is too little cooperation supporting affordable housing investments (code enforcement, regional planning, rental market need).

Communities have benefited economically from housing activities. Projects create opportunities to develop local work force (starter) housing, assist partnerships enabling towns to support and develop financing tools and preserve existing housing. At the same time, other towns lack capacity to achieve such benefits. And area residents perceive rental housing projects as investor driven, unresponsive to the needs of the renter, and imposing costs on existing residents.

Participants identified nearly forty issues confronting them as they work to provide affordable housing in their communities. An examination of these issues gleaned nine gaps reported here as summary statements (these are presented as bullet points in the next column).

Public input on the housing priority included four questions for DED. These questions are reported below.

### Are you better off...

- ❖ No. Rental program performance and outcomes are a concern of local residents
- ❖ No. Existing housing stock is not being preserved.
- ❖ No. Homebuyer expectations do not intersect with affordable housing opportunities
- ❖ No. Rural areas and small towns are not being served by DED's focus on areas where the market is already producing housing
- ❖ No. Lack of stable program funding inhibits private sector effort to ramp up and deliver affordable housing in a sustained manner
- ❖ Yes. Programs supporting development of affordable housing are accessible and provide on-going opportunities for local projects.
- ❖ Yes. State commitment to develop local partnerships has encouraged capacity building and resulted in improved housing outcomes
- ❖ Yes. Available funds supporting affordable housing are being directed to identified needs
- ❖ Yes. Local housing partnerships have a better understanding of area needs and opportunities

### Has cooperation increased?

- ❖ No. Not on the local level within a community
- ❖ No. DED is not responsive to the priorities established by local communities
- ❖ No. Housing program mandates (LBP, energy efficiency) create barriers to providing aid
- ❖ No. Lack of continuity in program staff and changing guidelines taxes local capacity
- ❖ Yes. Increased cooperation on the local level
- ❖ Yes. DED is more aware of barriers to provision of affordable housing

### Benefit economically...

- ❖ No. Projects are not local initiatives and impose costs on existing residents
- ❖ No. Still lack rental units and need owner-occupied rehabilitation
- ❖ No. Local housing conditions and income levels are barriers to accessing programs
- ❖ Yes. Owner-occupied housing rehabilitation programs are beneficial
- ❖ Yes. Affordable housing creates opportunities for work force and attracts commuters
- ❖ Yes. Where housing activities have occurred the community has benefited

- ✧ How do you evaluate the need and rationale for changes in the allocation of funds supporting affordable housing programs?
- ✧ How effective is the set aside funding for Native American housing? How was the amount of funds dedicated for this category determined?
- ✧ How did you identify the level of need for housing for the mentally challenged? How did you establish the level of funding to serve this housing priority?
- ✧ Has cooperation increased between DED, NIFA and USDA in the packaging of program funds?

### <> The Homeless Priority

The second public input item was the Homeless Priority for DED. Responding to the question about their situation relative to last year, participants reported mixed outcomes in regards to the goal to provide a continuum of services and activities. Respondents who were of the opinion that services and activities were not more readily available to serve the homeless cited increased demand for services and lack of financial resources to provide the varied services, especially shelters and transitional housing. Other participants reported that the availability of services had increased, with most funding going for supportive services. Sustaining services, especially educational services, was noted to be critical to successful outcomes.

Queried whether homelessness has declined, participants held differing opinions. Among those who believed homeless has been reduced, they credited improved cooperation among service providers and coordination of service delivery. Participants who asserted that homelessness has increased attribute the trend to poor economic conditions and low wage jobs. They reported demand for services from transient homeless and calls on local food pantries had increased.

There was a consensus among the participants on the positive outcome of the focus on the continuum of care to the homeless. Delivery of services to the homeless has improved due to better coordination among area service providers. This has been facilitated by better communication among providers at and between all levels, including the state and local providers in the field.

Finally, participants were asked to identify gaps in providing successful homeless services. These comments were grouped and examined, producing five

### Gaps in providing services...

- ❖ GAP: Funds to support affordable housing (e.g. deep subsidies, mandated services)
- ❖ GAP: Sufficient funds for each housing activity
- ❖ GAP: Readiness and capacity at the local level
- ❖ GAP: Flexibility of programs to meet local need
- ❖ GAP: Recognition of affordable housing as a basic service
- ❖ GAP: Provision of continuum of services supporting affordable housing households
- ❖ GAP: Prioritized funds to create accessible and "Visitable" housing units
- ❖ GAP: Support for successful models of housing development beyond pilot project
- ❖ GAP: Support for housing in mixed use CDB

### Are you better off...

- ❖ No. Homeless population has not decreased and in some areas it has increased
- ❖ No. Near homeless population appears to be increasing
- ❖ No. Communities are not able to serve the varied needs of the homeless (shelter, housing, services) and local providers require additional state aid to meet these needs
- ❖ No. Available programs do not address the causes of homelessness
- ❖ Yes. Organizations are able to find the resources necessary to serve the homeless
- ❖ Yes. But there is concern that the number of homeless persons will get far worse given the increasing cost of necessities (utilities, gasoline for vehicles, etc.)
- ❖ Yes. Geneva has a new housing facility for girls who are "at risk"; serves as a transitional placement residence for HHSS clients from other areas

### Has homelessness been reduced?

- ❖ No. The number of homeless persons has increased
- ❖ No. Economic conditions and low wage jobs are increasing the number of near homeless
- ❖ Yes. The number of homeless persons has decreased

### How?

- ❖ Improved cooperation among providers to identify need, fund services and coordination of service delivery to the homeless and transient population
- ❖ Homelessness has not been reduced; still serving transient homeless, domestic abuse cases, and an increasing demand for local food pantry resources

summary statements (these are presented as bullet points in the next column).

Participants were interested in obtaining special populations data and inquired whether DED could provide better data to assist them in directing their efforts to serve the homeless. Their question to DED:

❖ What is the number of homeless and near homeless persons?

Another question, or issue of concern, regarded portability of assistance and services. Their question to DED:

❖ What will be the impact on local service providers' budgets with the new portability of aid? How will local providers be able to budget cost of services for clients who move out of the local area and into a different jurisdiction but still maintain a claim on services from the originating provider?

#### ◆ Non-Housing Economic Development Priority

Public input on Non-Housing Economic Development Individuals participating at two area meetings were active economic development professionals. Other participants were private citizens, elected officials, consultants and community development agents.

Overall, participants were of the opinion that their communities had benefited from the availability of the tools and services available through the CDBG economic development program. The program has resulted in jobs and productivity enhancements. While some participants did not have an opinion, others questioned the effectiveness of the program in rural areas given program restrictions and allowable activities.

Communities are working to take advantage of this goal and view the program as an important ED tool. Local capacity was identified as one reason why the program may not be used to its best advantage.

Projects can provide local and area-wide benefits beyond the direct benefits to businesses and employees. ED professionals noted they could reach more clients if the eligible program uses were broadened.

Participants were of the opinion that these projects are helping residents acquire good jobs. Other participants questioned how an assessment of the success of assisted projects could be made without more data.

#### Continuum of care improved...

- ❖ Yes. Coordination among service providers has improved the delivery of services to the homeless
- ❖ Yes. But perception that improved assistance has negative outcome of abuse of the system

#### Gaps providing services...

- ❖ GAP: Providing supportive services which assist the homeless to become self sufficient
- ❖ GAP: Improved monitoring of the programs to verify services are not being abused
- ❖ GAP: Awareness among the homeless and service providers of the availability of services
- ❖ GAP: Availability of income and employment opportunities
- ❖ GAP: Resources (funds and providers) to support delivery of services to the homeless and near homeless

#### Are you better off...

- ❖ No. ED program priorities do not recognize needs and priorities of small cities and rural areas and it is too restrictive in terms of eligible activities (need retail and job skills)
- ❖ Don't Know. Aware of the ED program and see it as a useful tool
- ❖ Don't Know. There has not been any DED-assisted ED projects (only state roads and corrections expenditures)
- ❖ Yes. ED projects have resulted in jobs and productivity enhancements at local

businesses

#### Working to take advantage...

- ❖ No. Local capacity and awareness needs to be improved
- ❖ No. ED program does not recognize that housing development is economic development (Move ED funds into the Housing category)
- ❖ Yes. This is an important tool in our tool kit but ED rules limit its usefulness in directing resources to local priorities and needs

#### Projects reach...

- ❖ Local and area residents and industries directly benefit when opportunities to employ this tool
- ❖ We have the capacity to serve many more

Participants were asked to identify gaps in providing successful economic development projects. Their comments are summarized as bullet points in the next column. Perhaps the most widely viewed gap was the inflexibility of the program to serve the needs of small communities and rural areas (particularly the exclusion of retail sector oriented projects).

Several questions about various aspects of the economic development priority were fielded during the four public input meetings. These questions are reported below.

#### Questions for DED:

- ❖ Are public funds used in the ED program creating jobs that raise the income of benefiting wage earners to a level where they don't need public housing assistance?
- ❖ What has resulted from the state's sector study? Has the \$500,000 spend on this study created any new jobs?
- ❖ What have been the results of recruitment efforts using ED program funds? DED should report a measurement of cost relative to benefit for this expenditure.
- ❖ What are the results of Economic Development program funds invested to date? Specifically of the activities resulting from the state industry sector study and industrial recruitment.
- ❖ In order to assess the impact of this DED program we need to see the data on "good jobs" created by program activities.

#### <> The CDBG Community Development Priority

Public input on Community Development Participants identified CDBG program funds as an important source of assistance for communities to address community infrastructure problems. Although several communities are better off today than they were last year relative to this goal, other communities reported they were not better off because they were unsuccessful in obtaining program funds.

Participants at meetings across the region wished to see additional program funds allocated to this category. They admitted the lack of capital system planning places towns in a precarious fiscal position when projects are implemented.

Participants who are not working to take advantage of this goal identified the area-wide benefit requirement as a barrier to accessing the program and their dislike of mandates driving local projects. In addition, the turnover of local leadership affects capacity and awareness of opportunities to access programs.

businesses if we could expand the local revolving loan fund program

#### Acquire good jobs...

- ❖ No. ED rules do not allow for funds to be used for certain projects that would provide new opportunities (and enhance the local economy) for residents to acquire good jobs
- ❖ Yes. But the program would benefit from more flexibility in serving opportunities as they arise
- ❖ Yes. Project benefiting from the ED program have resulted in new jobs and retention of existing jobs

#### Economic development gaps...

- ❖ GAP: Lack of funding for small business development and entrepreneurial efforts
- ❖ GAP: Local capacity to support Economic Development efforts
- ❖ GAP: ED rules hinder the usefulness of this tool in small communities and rural areas
- ❖ GAP: Definition of available work force numbers in "local area" fails to capture the rural labor market commuting mobility
- ❖ GAP: Ability of local market to capture large employers' contracted services results in leakage from local market

#### Are you better off...

- ❖ No. State and federal mandates on community system performance impose costs on residents but the mandates do not come with funding to help the costs of the projects
- ❖ Yes. Program funds are an important funding resource for communities working to address community infrastructure problems
- ❖ Yes. Need additional funds for public works and Business Development projects (too much funding in Economic Development category)

#### Working to take advantage...

- ❖ No. Would like to access program funds but the community does not qualify or they are not aware of opportunities to serve special needs populations within the community
- ❖ Yes. Communities are organizing local and area-wide cooperative efforts to identify, assess select and implement infrastructure projects to improve community services
- ❖ Yes. But the complexity and time requirements to develop a grant application and meet program rules often oblige

Those participants who are working to take advantage of this goal indicated they have planning processes underway to prepare for infrastructure projects. However, they expressed concern about the loss of DED field service staff assistance which they rely upon for information and technical assistance.

Participants reported they were successful in serving the populations of their entire community and within targeted areas. Other participants stated they were unable to reach any persons within their community because of the LMA beneficiary requirement of the program.

Communities which benefited from grant funds for infrastructure projects reported that the assistance did indeed help residents least able to pay for the new or improved services. They stated the projects would not have been feasible without the grant assistance. However, other participants stated the projects resulted in increased costs for all residents. They believed the design standards were too demanding; loss of the "best practice advocate" Nebraska Mandate Management Initiative led to this sort of outcome.

Participants identified several gaps in providing successful public works projects. These include a lack of capacity (expertise and financial), the availability of sufficient grant funds to assist towns, the CDBG income eligibility criteria and inconsistent funding levels for the community development category. Participants expressed concern about their ability to provide infrastructure services oriented toward the youth which would improve the community's attractiveness and encourage young families to remain or return to the community.

#### <> CDBG Business Development Priority

The fifth public input item was on the CDBG business development priority. Individuals participating at three area meetings were directly involved in community-based business and economic development activities.

Responding to the question about their situation relative to last year, participants reported positive outcomes in regards to support and availability of small business services. However, they voiced concern about the restrictions on grant eligible activities, especially retail and tourism business services. The issue of gap financing for businesses remains a perplexing problem for providers.

When asked if they are working to take advantage of this

communities to rely on private or regional providers

#### Infrastructure projects reach...

- ❖ Many communities are able to serve their entire populations but few have the capacity to create projects to serve targeted areas or populations
- ❖ Communities are investigating opportunities to serve targeted areas and address issues of slum and blight in order to access CDBG funds for community improvements

#### Helping those least able to pay...

- ❖ No. Many projects are a result of unfunded mandates which impose local costs that would not need to be borne by residents if the projects were not required
- ❖ Yes. Without CDBG funds the cost of these infrastructure projects would result in very high user rates or assessments which would cause a financial hardship for many residents

#### Public works project gaps...

- ❖ GAP: Lack of capacity at the local level to plan for and develop CDBG public works projects
- ❖ GAP: Inconsistency in annual CDBG programs and application process is a barrier to access
- ❖ GAP: Not encouraging and/or requiring mixed income housing beneficiaries in housing development projects benefiting from assisted infrastructure improvement projects
- ❖ GAP: Not enough CDBG funds available for Community Development projects
- ❖ GAP: Calculating LMI threshold on an area basis prevents communities from obtaining CDBG funds even though many residents who would benefit are LMI persons
- ❖ GAP: Retaining future community leadership -- We spend a lot of resources educating our youth who then move out of the area

#### Are you better off...

- ❖ No. Locally sponsored small business development activities are not eligible even though they serve the priority needs of the area
- ❖ No. Job training programs are not available or do not serve local needs
- ❖ No. Investment capital for gap financing for small businesses is a tool that small rural areas need to have more readily available
- ❖ Yes. CDBG program support for small business services plays a pivotal role in

goal, respondents identified their efforts to support and deliver business services. But their efforts were made more difficult by the barriers of grant eligible activities, local matching requirements, and grant eligibility thresholds.

Participants reported they are able to serve area businesses and clients but that many more could be served if additional funding was made available to support program delivery. Existing staff were spread too thin to serve additional clients or to offer additional micro business services. There is a high demand for small business assistance (entrepreneurial, retail facilities, micro business training) that is not available via the CDBG program.

Small business development and job training programs supported by the CDBG program are helping area residents to acquire good jobs, particularly those funds that support state-wide small business programs such as REAP. However, local needs for programs that support business transition and assist central business district reinvestment are critical to successfully repositioning former retail facilities to serve office and service uses.

There is a high demand on local providers to develop programs supporting retail sector projects. Providers are working to respond to these market forces in order to maintain existing and expand services for area populations. At present, these locally identified priorities are not CDBG eligible activities and thus CDBG program funds are not available to assist communities to acquire (and maintain) good jobs.

Finally, participants were asked to identify gaps in providing successful small business development projects and job training. The availability of program funds to support capacity building programs was the most often cited gap. Identified programs would assist with business ownership transition, support staffing of REAP and similar services, and entrepreneurial training. Inconsistent funding streams and the lack of modern training facilities are concerns. The lack of programs that seek to retain and attract young business people is a serious problem.

<> The Planning Priority

providing these services at the local level

#### Working to take advantage...

- ❖ No. Local needs and priorities do not fit within CDBG eligible activity criteria of the program
- ❖ Yes. Communities are working with area businesses to identify and develop opportunities to utilize this community development tool

#### Served by business development funds...

- ❖ Existing DED Business Development program rules do not serve the needs of communities and businesses in the area
- ❖ The Business Development program supports delivery of services in the area but providers are overloaded with current work load and not able to serve the demand for existing services

#### Acquire good jobs...

- ❖ No. Local priority programs to support small business enterprises are not eligible activities
- ❖ Yes. CDBG funds support state-wide small business services which are utilized by area businesses and benefit area residents

#### Business development gaps...

- ❖ GAP: Availability of funding to support small business and entrepreneurial programs and service delivery at the local level
- ❖ GAP: Availability of adequately equipped facilities for training and program delivery
- ❖ GAP: Programs that nurture opportunities within the community and local area
- ❖ GAP: Limited allowable uses for CDBG Reuse program funds in local Revolving Loan Fund

#### Questions for DED:

- ❖ How, who, and what defines a "serious community / business development project"?
- ❖ Where is the data and reports evaluating the outcomes achieved for this goal?
- ❖ Who is able to take advantage of this goal? What are they accomplishing?
- ❖ We would like to see how DED measures progress toward this goal.

The sixth public input item was the CDBG planning priority for DED to give communities the opportunity to solve community development problems at a local level.

Participants at three of the four area meetings had utilized CDBG planning funds. Responses to all four questions generally reflected a community's ability to access the program; a dichotomy centered on the income eligibility criteria.

In response to the first question, residents of areas where planning funds had been used identified direct benefits resulting from local and area-wide projects. These local planning efforts would not have been completed without the grant assistance. Participants who indicated they were not better off reported they were not able to access planning funds because they did not qualify under the benefit to LMI persons criteria. They suggest the LMI criteria is too restrictive and overlooks the actual need for and impact of planning funds in small rural communities.

Meeting participants identified an indirect benefit of the CDBG planning category. The mere availability of grant funds to assist local planning efforts provides an incentive for communities to organize for community betterment activities. These benefits accrue to the community whether or not they actually receive grants funds.

When asked if they are working to take advantage of the situation, respondents reported on-going efforts to implement recommendations and plans developed through planning activities. Project costs and financing are major obstacles. Unfunded state and federal mandates for public system improvements are a concern throughout the region.

Local capacity to conduct community betterment activities affects how much of a community's client base can be reached with planning funds. While all respondents are familiar with an area-wide benefit test, few are aware of the opportunity to serve targeted areas and populations. Also, it was reported that communities opt not to participate in the planning program, perhaps indicating a lack of capacity or awareness to access the program.

Finally, participants were asked to identify gaps in providing successful planning projects. Local capacity and negative perceptions of grants were cited as barriers on the local level. Others viewed the CDBG program rules that define benefits within distinct jurisdictions as a gap because it fails to recognize the true extent to which benefits accrue to persons throughout an entire area.

#### Are you better off...

- ❖ No. Resolution of problems often involves affecting a wider service area (county-wide or inter-county) but the hub community that is able to address the issue is not LMI eligible
- ❖ Yes. Planning funds enable communities to engage professional services for expert assistance in resolving local problems and assisting local efforts
- ❖ Yes. The availability of funds to assist communities in addressing local issues is an incentive for communities to organize for community improvement efforts

#### Working to take advantage...

- ❖ No. The state should provide planning funds to any rural town, regardless of the income level, that is mandated to upgrade or improve existing public services which are otherwise functioning as designed
- ❖ Yes. CDBG funds for planning activities assist communities to address important local problems
- ❖ Yes. CDBG planning grants provide essential financial assistance for towns which could not otherwise develop and implement projects

#### Served by planning funds...

- ❖ We are not able to serve community needs because the community is not eligible for grants due to the LMI percentage criteria
- ❖ We could serve our entire community population if we would organize efforts to seek CDBG planning funds but for various reasons the community has opted to not pursue grants
- ❖ The entire community benefits, especially those least able to directly pay for services, because we could not afford to conduct a study or plan without the grant financial assistance
- ❖ Communities can use planning funds to serve targeted areas and populations and address issues and resolve problems which otherwise will not be addressed for lack of local funds

#### Planning project gaps...

- ❖ GAP: Leadership that is able to recognize the benefits of planning for the provision of future community services
- ❖ GAP: Capacity of officials and residents is a barrier to successfully developing and implementing community planning projects
- ❖ GAP: CDBG program rules which define benefits to distinct jurisdictions and fail to recognize the extent that benefits reach throughout an area

Gap: Local perceptions about the use of grant funds must be overcome in order to position communities to benefit from the "planning to plan" process and CDBG programs

## <> Relationship with DED

The seventh and final informational item discussed at the public input meetings was the participants' relationship with DED. Participants were asked three questions designed to identify opportunities to improve collaborative efforts with DED in addressing local priorities.

First, the organizations identified their priorities for next year. Positioning their community to succeed was the common goal of participants who represented varied activities across the region. Identified priorities include enhancing existing community systems and business services, encouraging partnerships to organize and build consensus on development efforts, and preservation of the housing stock to provide housing opportunities.

Most participants had no direct relationship working with DED program representatives. Those who had contacted DED regarding a particular project found staff responsive to their concerns and inquiries. Representatives of service providers are positive about their relationship with DED although they are concerned about the burdensome paperwork involved in the programs. Providers expressed concern about the availability of staff and accessibility of DED program resources to support their efforts.

Finally, participants were asked to identify room for improvement in their relationship with DED. Other than concerns about specific projects and the ability of communities to access program funds, there was common concern regarding DED's inflexibility and recognition of the urgency of local priorities.

## <> Community Development System Priority

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Our priorities for next year...	Our relationship with DED is...	Room for improvements...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ Basic infrastructure improvements</li><li>❖ Preservation of the housing stock</li><li>❖ Organizing partnerships and building community consensus to focus efforts</li><li>❖ Enhancing economic development programs (including retail) and expanding business assistance tool kits</li><li>❖ Tourism promotion activities and improving attraction support facilities</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ Helpful -- DED is responsive to our concerns</li><li>❖ We have no relationship with DED</li><li>❖ DED is more responsive to our needs than are other state agencies</li><li>❖ Overlooked -- It is most difficult to get the attention of DED staff</li><li>❖ Burdensome -- Paperwork is a barrier to accessing the CDBG program, specifically the application process</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ Improve the award of funding for housing development by reviewing the past performance of developers in providing appropriate, quality housing that meets local needs</li><li>❖ Assist communities' efforts to build local capacity</li><li>❖ Modify program guidelines to provide for increased flexibility in addressing identified priorities in rural areas</li><li>❖ Objectivity -- Welcome candid insights during project development stage and the award selection review process</li></ul>

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## Section II

### Recommendations to address priorities relative to housing, homelessness, community and economic development.

The following recommendations are based on an analysis of the comments and observations recorded at the four public input meetings held in the southeast Nebraska communities of Weeping Water, Tecumseh, Seward and Geneva. They are not prioritized, but rather simply presented within the priority issue framework established for each meeting "order of discussion."

### Recommendations on Housing Priority

Local housing markets are characterized by their distinct situations. The identified needs in supporting affordable housing activities vary by the situation of each community located across the southeast region. In addition, barriers to participation in the housing markets can be addressed through special activities that are necessary for neighborhood revitalization and community economic development. While each area meeting recorded comments on the lack of program funding to support local housing priorities, the local needs and priorities varied.

- ◆ Establish consistent levels of funding within regions to facilitate local and area planning and development of affordable housing activities.
- ◆ Assist housing providers to produce new construction which is responsive to the target community's needs, including deep subsidies for lot creation, affordable rents and purchase, and universal accessible and "visitability" designs.
- ◆ Allocate funding that is flexible within designated housing activities that assist communities in furthering local priorities to effect improvements in local housing markets (e.g. rehabilitation, demolition, code enforcement).
- ◆ Assist communities and providers to develop and enhance capacity to develop, operate, and provide a continuum of services supporting affordable housing activities.

### Recommendations on Homeless Priority

Communities are actively providing assistance to people who are homeless and at-risk of becoming homeless. Success has been achieved in improving the delivery of services through coordination and cooperation among local service providers. However, these activities are primarily those which address the manifestations of homelessness rather than the causes of homelessness.

- ◆ Assist local service providers in delivering supportive services which assist the homeless and near-homeless to become self sufficient (job training and placement, career counseling, education).
- ◆ Increase the amount of resources available to maintain system delivery mechanisms and enhance coordinated interagency service delivery.
- ◆ Improve monitoring efforts to safeguard the best and most efficient use of available program resources directed to actual needs.
- ◆ Monitor the effects of the continuum of services portability-feature as it affects the sustainability of providers to budget and deliver local service area needs.
- ◆ Increase the amount of resources available to provide public facilities; such as special needs shelters for the "homeless" and the "at-risk of becoming homeless."

### Recommendations on Non-Housing Economic Development Priority

Public comments regarding this DED priority focused on the need to support entrepreneurship, Central Business District redevelopment (including building rehabilitation), and retail development support activities. Many of these activities could be assisted through DED programs for microenterprise support such as providing credit, technical assistance, and general support (counseling, childcare, peer support).

- ◆ Provide for funding flexibility for local economic development priorities; that is, allow for retail development, storefront renovation, tourism development, small business assistance etc. Projects and funding needs vary from community to community, region to region.
- ◆ Provide financial assistance to local economic developers to facilitate entrepreneurial training, business transfer (buy-in), and support from REAP and other small business services.
- ◆ Assist local economic development programs with capacity development and support for regional delivery mechanisms.
- ◆ Explore opportunities to improve the usefulness of the ED program by accommodating the character of the local market size, associated area-wide linkages and labor/commuter-shed.
- ◆ Reduce barriers to accessing/maintaining CDBG ED funds. For example, local funding requirements, tourism benefit restrictions (e.g., 2,500 tourist from 100 miles or more), financial assistance to “large” projects only, expand access to ED reuse funds.

### Recommendation on Community Development Priority

The community infrastructure / public works program was perhaps the most widely recognized source of funds available to communities for community betterment activities. At the same time, participants repeatedly commented that many communities lack the capacity to identify opportunities to use available community development programs and access program funding.

- ◆ Provide flexibility in compliance with national objective for non-LMI communities. Consider regional benefit, targeted areas, elimination of slum & blight and/or target a percentage of CDBG funds for non-LMI communities, rather than a strict interpretation of LMI benefit.
- ◆ Support project decisions made at the local level. Advocate for cost-effective solutions to problems encountered by rural communities (e.g. lower user rates, unfunded mandates, etc.)
- ◆ Ensure a fair and equitable distribution of program funds for Public Works project.

### Recommendation on Business Development Priority

A diverse array of services is needed to support business development efforts in small, rural communities. The availability of resources to support these local efforts is a concern throughout southeast Nebraska; resources such as funding, facilities, capacity and sustainable leadership.

- ◆ Provide support for local economic development needs. This includes ED planning, downtown storefront renovation, retail development, tourism attractions, etc.
- ◆ Allow more ED funds to be recaptured at the local level so as to capitalize larger reuse accounts.
- ◆ Assist local ED service providers conduct and deliver services such as REAP, Microenterprise program, EDGE, passage of LB840, Tax Increment Financing, Business transfer, etc.

### Recommendations on Planning Priority

- ◆ Non-LMI communities would like some “flexibility” in meeting the national CDBG objective for community-wide projects (e.g., Comprehensive Plans, water and sewer system projects), rather than strict interpretation of “benefit to LMI persons.” For example, do not penalize applications submitting under the Slum & Blight objective and/or target a certain percent of available CDBG funds for non-LMI communities and consider project’s overall impact to the region instead of the community-proper
- ◆ Encourage planning projects that foster self-sufficiency. For example, Capital Improvement Plans, Comprehensive Development Plans, Strategic Planning, Community Prioritization Plans, regional cooperation, community foundation planning, infrastructure studies and economic development plans.
- ◆ Maintain and perhaps expand CDBG planning funding flexibility.

### Recommendations on Relationship with DED

- ◆ Allow for a more candid discussion of program barriers or delivery of CDBG resources. Oftentimes, DED “customers” withhold constructive criticism out of concern about perceived consequences for future project funding.
- ◆ Reduce set-asides in funding allocation.
- ◆ Allow needs to be identified, defined and addressed at the local level rather than state-wide or from the State-level down.
- ◆ Advocate for projects that address local needs, rather than simply discounting projects because they do not - on the surface - meet the strict interpretation of LMI benefit. Help find a way to assist practicable projects.
- ◆ Continue efforts to reduce or eliminate local barriers to accessing CDBG program.
- ◆ Recognize the budgetary constraints of rural communities, and their ability to provide local match.