



Grant Funds Go Further

CDBG funds awarded to nine local groups

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By **ARRISSIA OWEN**

Community Development Block Grant funds

Nine local, eligible applicants were chosen by the Big Bear Lake City Council for funding from the city's Community Development Block Grant funds.

Local applicants awarded include:

- The Mothers on Mountain Project, a parenting resource center that provides parenting classes.
- The Kiwanis Club's medical alert program for the elderly.
- Soroptimist International's after-school Rainbow Kids program.
- DOVES, the local domestic abuse outreach center's transitional housing servicing battered and abused spouses and their families.
- Big Bear Library's literacy education program.
- The Hummingbird Project, which provides school supplies and services for needy school-age children.
- Bear Valley Unified School District's Healthy Start services and its anti-violence program, **Peace Builders**.
- U.S. Adaptive Recreation Center, which provides recreation possibilities for people with disabilities.
- The Lighthouse Project's construction of a greenhouse used for the Peace Garden program at Big Bear High School and community garden plots on Fox Farm Road.

Sometimes the county circumvents itself. This time, it worked in Big Bear Valley's favor.

For the 2011-12 fiscal year, San Bernardino County set up new guidelines for cities to distribute Community Development Block Grant funding. The county will no longer match funds for smaller projects recommended by participating cities, instead only funding major capital and infrastructure improvement projects in unincorporated areas.

The CDBG program is federally funded, making grants available for eligible applicants that provide services to low and moderate-income households or persons. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) establishes the CDBG regulations and administers the program through state and local governments. Cities may still allocate funds in smaller amounts—with a catch.

Proposed grant activity may include public service activities such as social, education or health services. The grant activity may also include a capital improvement project that serves financially disadvantaged households.

The county's Economic Development Agency manages the CDBG program for HUD in unincorporated portions of the county and participating cities, including Big Bear Lake. A city's permanent population and the number of economically challenged city residents dictates the amount allocated for CDBG grant funding.

Big Bear Lake has \$93,075 in CDBG funds to distribute for the coming fiscal year. Nine local agencies applied. The money includes \$40,375 of CDBG funds (of which \$9,896 is earmarked for the Senior Home Repair Program due to a prior agreement). There is also an additional \$62,596 of one-time unprogrammed CDBG funds available because a former community-based organization that previously received CDBG funding, Operation Breakthrough, sold its property.

New CDBG regulations require cities to manage the projects receiving funding by issuing reimbursements, creating monthly budget reports, conducting inspections and undertaking other procedures necessary to comply with HUD regulations for each project that it funds. To manage all nine projects, the city would need to employ a CDBG or EDA analyst, which would come out of the city's fiscal budget. The county formerly conducted the oversight.

But the county is helping city governments get creative.

A county representative advised the city to consider allocating its CDBG funding to a shovel-ready capital improvement project. The Knickerbocker Road street improvements between Stone and Pine Knot avenues near the affordable housing project are already under construction and qualifies for the funding.

More than \$93,000 is already allocated for the project from the city's general fund. For a capital improvement project that exceeds \$75,000, the county oversees the project.

By substituting CDBG bucks for general fund moneys allocated for the Knickerbocker project, the \$93,075 in redirected discretionary funds would be available for the City Council to redirect to the nine applicants. This option would help the city skirt the need to hire a consultant and is not considered a gift of public funds, according to Cheri Haggerty, public information officer for the city of Big Bear Lake.

Once that was decided, the city still had to consider how to divide the funds between the nine applicants, always a difficult consideration, Haggerty said. This year, the City Council asked applicants during its Feb. 28 City Council meeting to gather in an adjoining room and decide how the money should be divvied. In the end, the nine groups decided to split the money fairly, with seven of the groups receiving \$10,000 each.

The other two applicants split the difference proportionately because one, the Kiwanis club, asked for less than \$10,000 in its original request and the other, Healthy Start, needed a larger chunk because the agency lost a substantial amount of its funding, Haggerty said.

"This is always hard," Haggerty said. "It's nice they were able to come to an agreement amongst

themselves.”

The reasoning behind the county’s suggestion for switching the allocations probably has to do with budget cuts, said Jim Miller, director of city building and planning. “It takes the same amount of work to monitor a small project as it does a larger one,” he said. The county is just trying to reduce its workload, like every other agency, he said. “It’s a cost-saving measure.”

The city is required to give the county its funding recommendations by March 11. There is a public hearing before the county Board of Supervisors on April 19.

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