

Town of Pierceton
Public Hearing Minutes
Pierceton Community Building
January 8, 2024 @ 6:32 pm

Purpose of Meeting

OCRA HELP CDBG-CV Construction Application - "Sidewalk Improvements"

- The second of two public hearings.

Present

Council members Matt Brubaker, Glenn Hall, Eric Trump. Clerk-Treasurer Myra Mast. Town Attorney Tammy Keirn. Town Superintendent Casey Boggs. Town Marshal Jim Bumbaugh.

- Zach Dripps was present along with Chad Salzbrenner from Fleis & Vanderbrink and Amy Roe, the Kosciusko County Community Coordinator and former HELP coordinator.
- A sign-up sheet was passed around by MACOG to record the names of those present for the hearing.

Presentation by Zach Dripps from MACOG

Council President Matt Brubaker opened the public meeting and gave the floor to Zach Dripps, Grant Administrator with the Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG) to discuss the Town's application for grant funding with the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA).

Zach began by explaining the Town's participation in the OCRA HELP initiative.

In 2021, Kosciusko County was selected to participate in a new program, Hoosiers Enduring Legacy Program (HELP), with the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA). The Towns of Pierceton, Mentone, and Milford signed on to participate in a year-long process to create Strategic Investment Plans (SIP) which outlined strategic investments to create a lasting legacy in their communities.

The SIP was adopted last year, in 2023. Since then, each community has been working with OCRA and the Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG) to proceed with their respective eligible projects to apply for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)-CV funds for implementation.

The Town of Pierceton has selected their sidewalk improvement construction project on School Street and Third Street to apply for CDBG-CV funds. This is the second public hearing to provide residents an opportunity to learn more about this project. The application must be submitted by January 21, 2024.

1. Goals and Objectives of the CDBG Program
 - a. The goals and objectives of the HELP CDBG-CV program is to help communities address their needs and respond to the Coronavirus Pandemic and create a lasting impact on the community.
2. Community Development and Housing Needs of the Applicant
 - a. The construction grant supports the Town to respond to the impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure residents have safe social distancing and walkable connections to the Pierceton Elementary School and Pierceton Park.
3. Proposed Activities for the Project and the Amount to be Requested
 - a. The construction grant will assist the Town to construct 6-foot wide sidewalks on School Street from the entrances at Pierceton Park and the Pierceton Elementary School to Third Street, and then on Third Street from School Street to Catholic Street.
 - b. The total cost for this project is approximately \$501,428.
4. Total Amount of CDBG funds available
 - a. Kosciusko County was awarded, as a participant in the HELP program, up to \$1 million in CDBG-CV funds to use for projects from the SIP. The County agreed the funds would be split between the three participating communities for their top projects.
 - b. The Town of Pierceton is requesting \$280,042 of CDBG-CV funds.
5. Amount and Source of Local Funds to be Expended on the Project
 - a. This program required the participating Towns to provide at least 30% of the Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recover Funds (CLFRF) from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) amount for the projects from their SIP. For the Town of Pierceton, that is approximately \$221,386.
6. Proposed Amount of Funds to be Used to Benefit Low- and Moderate-Income People (LMI)
 - a. Starting in September through October 2023, MACOG and the Town conducted an income survey to determine if the Town would be eligible for this grant program. Communities seeking CDBG grants are required to

meet one of the three National Objectives, in this case it is to benefit 51% or more of Low-to-Moderate Income persons.

- b. After consultation with OCRA and HUD, the project service area was determined to be the homes located within the surrounding area of Catholic Street, First Street, School Street, and Seventh Street. Given the project will benefit residents living in the immediate neighborhood, we had to do a Census Income Survey requiring us to survey 100% of the residents in the neighborhood.
 - c. Concluding the income survey, it was determined that the project service has approximately 52.1% of low to moderate income residents. If awarded, approximately \$145,901.88 of the grant funds will be used to benefit low-to-moderate income residents.
7. Notification of any Displacement Resulting from the Proposed Activities or Notification of No Displacement
- a. This project will not result in the displacement of individuals or businesses.

Zach concluded the presentation with a request for questions or clarifications. The following is the list of questions and responses provided.

- Resident asked for clarification on which side of the road the sidewalks are planned to be on.
 - Chad Salzbrenner, Project Engineer with Fleis & Vandenbrink, responded that design decisions are not final at this point, however, they are looking at the east side of 3rd Street and south side of School Street.
 - Resident asked why they were looking to use the east side, when the west side have existing sidewalks. Chad clarified the decision on which side has not been determined. They will be evaluating the impacts to the project and available right-of-way.
- The same Resident expressed concern about this project removing trees that are along the street.
 - Chad mentioned they will do their best to keep what they can and they will plan to replace trees if needed.
- Another Individual stated she is a Social Worker and is representing several residents' concerns. Her first question relates to how and why the income survey service area was chosen.
 - Zach responded that the service area was selected in consultation with OCRA and HUD officials. Their team determined the neighborhood bounded by the streets of Catholic Street, First Street, School Street, and Seventh Street would potentially utilize a portion of the sidewalk to go to

or from the school and or park. Further, the OCRA and HUD team determined the area was small enough to require a 100% census survey, thus requiring responses from all individuals in the service area.

- She followed up her question wanting to know the actual response rate for the income survey.
 - Zach responded we identified 101 households within the service area. Of the 101 households, 88 surveys were completed, either by mail, phone, or in-person. Only 3 of the households declined to take the survey and the remaining 10 households were non-responsive. Zach explained that at that point in the data collection, we were able to mark the 13 homes as “above the threshold” and still hit the overall more than 51% of people being LMI.
- She continued her questions, asking about how individuals were trained to conduct the survey. A resident provided her with an example of a Town Employee coming to the house with her daughter. This resident felt they were targeted as potentially low-income.
 - Zach explained that he and his colleague Donny Ritsema were certified Grant Administrators by the Office of Community and Rural Affairs. As such, we are training in how to administer CDBG grants and how to conduct Income Surveys. As Grant Administrators we are permitted to train others to assist in gathering the survey results. All those who administered the survey and signed their name to the responses were trained by MACOG to do this work. Further, to help explain the rationale on utilizing local staff, Zach explained that often, when going door to door in a community, residents are more hesitant to open their doors to strangers. Therefore, often using a familiar face can often get more survey results for the grant application.
 - The questioner asked if there were sign-in sheets or documentation on who was training. Zach responded that documentation was not required to be created.
 - The questioner further asked when the decision was made to allow the Town Employees to be involved with the income survey. She stated that residents expressed to her that in previous meetings that the Town would not be involved. Zach responded that he was unaware of the Town making that statement. Matt Brubaker (Town Council President) and Myra Mast (Town Clerk) stated there may be official minutes that she could review.
- Another resident asked about what the liability is for having sidewalks in front of their property. Additionally, who is responsible for maintenance and if there is a Town Ordinance that addresses the issue? They stated that many people may have chosen to live in homes without sidewalks to alleviate this issue.

- Matt asked the Town's Legal Counsel, Tammy Keirn, if she could respond.
- Tammy stated that she is not sure what the liability is for residents who have a sidewalk. If residents are concerned about their liability, they should discuss it with their lawyer and confirm what their insurance will cover.
- Tammy is unfamiliar at the time whether there is an ordinance about sidewalks and what it would have to say about maintenance. Matt and Tammy agreed to look into the ordinance and whether they should make any updates in the future.
- A resident asked why this location was chosen, especially 3rd Street. If they wanted to connect the school, why did they not choose to connect to Harvest Community Church, which is the emergency shelter for the school?
 - Matt responded that the Town did look at a few other areas first. Initially they wanted to do the Downtown sidewalks, but the Town anticipates needing utility upgrades there in the next few years, so it was advised not to proceed with that project. Next, they looked at a sidewalk along SR 13 to the Dollar General. It was determined that would be challenging to complete with this program due to needing to coordinate with INDOT. Lastly, this site was chosen because it was part of the trail plan from a few years ago (2014) and connects to the school. Additionally, the school is now connected to the church with the trail around the park.
 - The resident stated that while she was aware of this project, she wasn't aware that it would go down 3rd Street. She felt there wasn't enough communication about that.

Zach asked if there were any additional questions, and there were none. Zach clarified that the application is due to OCRA on January 21, 2024. After OCRA reviews the application and award the Town, there will be an additional public hearing to finalize the Environmental Document. At that time, the engineer will have more information on the proposed location of the project and specific impacts. Zach explained we are anticipating a 2025 construction schedule.

Amy Roe, the Kosciusko County Community Coordinator, then added that she wanted to thank everyone for attending this meeting and asking questions. She knows so often, in government work, that public meetings are not well attended. She thanked everyone for their passion for the Pierceton community and assured the public that the team shares their passion. She asked everyone for their forgiveness in the challenges of communication. She explained that the HELP process has been at times, and the Town and the team had to respond to various restrictions and changes to get to this project.

At this point, the Social Worker representing residents asked another question. She asked what if the costs increase on this project. Is the Town prepared to pay for the additional costs? Matt responded that at this point we don't know if the costs will be significantly higher than the estimate. If the costs do come in higher, we will have a discussion whether there are funds available to cover the increase or if we can change the scope. The Social Worker asked if that decision would be made at a public meeting, and Matt said it would have to come back to the Town Council for approval.

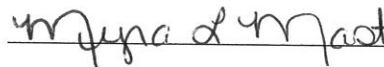
Matt, Council President, then asked if there were any more questions. He then closed the public meeting and transitioned to the rest of the Town Council's agenda.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Council, the meeting was adjourned at 7:13 pm.



Council President



Clerk-Treasurer