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## Nonprofits prepare for CDBG process

Friday, September 16, 2011

By [Melissa Flores](#)

### Public hearing gathers input on community needs for federal grant

A handful of residents showed up to a public hearing held at Community Services and Workforce Development to gather insight into what people feel are gaps in services in San Benito County.

The hearing is part of the process for the county to apply for the Community Development Block Grant, a federal grant that is administered through the state that supports such efforts as economic development and housing. Nonprofits and government agencies can apply for the grant, though the state has made some changes to the grant process that has made it unclear how much money San Benito will receive for the next funding cycle.

Nora Jimenez, of the CSWD, said that the county received \$400,000 for the 2010-11 grant cycle. The grant has seven areas in which communities can apply to support services such as housing rehabilitation programs and projects; homebuyer assistance programs; housing acquisition projects; housing new construction projects; public improvement projects; public facility projects and public services programs. In the past, the county has been able to apply for funding in two categories, though with changes to the funding cycle they may be able to apply for more categories.

"The types of activities and the amounts are anticipated to change," Jimenez said.

Most of the people who attended the meeting represented a nonprofit that has benefited from CDBG funding in the past, as well as members of the Community Action Board. The CAB members select which applications from nonprofits they will submit for the CDBG based on community surveys and input at the public hearings.

"We take into account what the community feels is a need - what gaps exist," said Enrique Arreola, the deputy director of the CSWD. "In January we will use that information for planning purposes."

Jimenez said that for the first time many of the services offered through the CSWD have waiting lists, such as those for housing and emergency shelters.

The notice of funding availability is expected to be released in early 2012, and the Community Action Board will likely accept applications from local nonprofits that are interested in applying in mid-October.

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The nonprofits represented at the meeting included the Community Food Bank, the Homeless Coalition and Emmaus House, all of which have received CDBG funding in the past, as well as Social Vocational Services, a nonprofit that serves adults with disabilities.

Liza Rodriguez, who is on the board of the Emmaus House, said that the organization has been funded with a CDBG grant in the past but they did not receive it in the last funding cycle.

"This year we don't have that funding and we are struggling to stay afloat," she said. "We took for granted that we had that funding and didn't think it would go away."

Emmaus House offers temporary shelter, food and other programs to woman and children who are leaving a domestic violence situation.

One of the CAB members asked if other funding is available for Emmaus House. Rodriguez said that the group has applied for grants from other private institutions, but the amounts tend to be much smaller than the \$100,000 they have received from CDBG in the past. Most of the grants they receive from other sources are \$10,000 or \$5,000. She also said that they have been working on outreach to the community.

"So many organizations fall under the same category, it's tough (to get grants,)" she said.

Rodriguez also said that though there may be more services in other communities, it can be mentally and psychologically hard on women from San Benito County to have to locate to another community.

"It's an impact having to start with something so different," she said.

Doug Emerson, a Hollister city councilman and a board member of the Homeless Coalition, said his experience with the homeless shelter applying for grants has been similar.

"Other grants are very difficult to get," he said. "For every one, there are maybe a hundred different applicants."

The budget for the homeless shelter, which is open Nov. 1 to March 30 is \$175,000, with about \$100,000 coming from CDBG grants. They also receive grants from the Community Foundation for San Benito County and the Monterey Peninsula Foundation. He said that he had heard that some in the community have said that the nonprofits should be sustainable on their own.

"That can't happen," Emerson said. "We rely on grants and donations. Without it (CDBG,) we would close our doors."

He said that the Homeless Coalition has been applying for a federal emergency shelter grant, but for the last three years they have not been successful in getting it. The grants are graded on a point system, and Emerson said last year they were off by 45 points, so they have changed some of the ways they operate to get a higher score this year.

The employees from Social Vocational Services said that their biggest concern is the need for PG&E assistance and rental assistance for the disabled adults with whom they work. One of the employees noted that they had two clients living in cars recently.

"The weather is nice so the shelter is closed," she said. "We can't find anything to help this person."

Mary Anne Hughes, the executive director of the Community Food Bank, said that she has seen the numbers of new members at the



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bank stabilize. But she said that she believes some people are moving out of San Benito to places with cheaper rent.

"If you've lost your house and your job, and you're on unemployment," there is nothing to keep them from moving out, she said. She said that there are two populations in San Benito - those making more than \$100,000 who commute out of town, and those who work locally who make less than \$50,000.

"Those making lots of money are not as involved as they need to be," Hughes said.

Hughes and Emerson both stressed that they would like to see the county or city sharing a grant writer or another person to do help with collaboration on the grant process.

"It's significant to put it together and it takes away from everything else we have to do," Hughes said.

The timeline for the Community Development Block Grant application will be online at [www.sbcjobs.org](http://www.sbcjobs.org) and another public hearing will be scheduled before the application for the CDBG is submitted.



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