CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PLAN

Foothills NC HOME Consortium

# Introduction

As an established Consortium of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Home Investment Partnerships Program, the Foothills NC HOME Consortium is required to have and actively implement a Citizen Participation Plan on behalf of McDowell County, the participating jurisdiction.

The plan describes how the Consortium will seek involvement and input from citizens in its programs using Home Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) funds. Input from people likely to be impacted by program activities is essential to the development of an effective program. The Foothills NC HOME Consortium seeks to exceed the minimum federal requirements and make citizen participation a reality in all stages of the process of developing, writing, and implementing the 5-year Consolidated Plan/Annual Action Plan. The HOME program provides affordable housing options and opportunities to low-to-moderate income residents of McDowell, Cleveland, Polk, and Rutherford counties, the area covered by the Foothills NC HOME Consortium (the Consortium).

Regulatory Requirements: Five-year Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plan

HUD’s minimum requirements for citizen participation are set out in the regulations for HOME Consortia in 24 CFR Part 91.401.

The focus for participation is the planning and reporting cycle for the Consolidated Plan for the HOME program. The planning process is in two parts: a Five-year Consolidated Plan which identifies and prioritizes the region’s housing and community development needs and develops long-term objectives and strategies for addressing them, and an Annual Action Plan which proposes specific activities to receive HOME assistance during the coming year. The Annual Action Plan is embedded within the five- year Consolidated Plan, which also includes an Assessment of Fair Housing/Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing. The Consortium is also required to prepare a Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER) which details accomplishments during the past fiscal year and relates them to the Consolidated Plan objectives.

Participation in developing plans, implementing projects, and evaluating accomplishments are encouraged through a variety of media and services, such as:

* Public hearings
* Online surveys
* Accommodations for persons with disabilities and non-English speaking persons
* Formal public comment periods
* Publication of plans and reports
* Paid newspaper advertisements
* Posting to the Foothills NC HOME Consortium website (<https://foothillsregion.org>)
* Open meetings of the Foothills NC HOME Consortium Board

The Consortium strives to encourage participation by low- and moderate-income persons, particularly those persons living within the Consortium jurisdiction.

# Public Hearings

McDowell County will hold a minimum of one public hearing for citizen participation annually when the Annual Action Plan is due. Additional public meetings may be held in the years where the Five-Year Consolidated Plan is submitted, which includes the Annual Action Plan for that year.

Public hearings will tentatively be held at regularly scheduled meetings of the McDowell County Board of Commissioners, generally held on the second and third Monday of the month at 5 pm and 11:30 am, respectively. The address for the public hearings is 69 N Main St., Marion, NC (McDowell County Admin Office) and additional information can be found on the webpage: <https://www.mcdowellgov.com/commissioners>

Citizen comments made at public hearings are given due consideration, summarized, and included in the Consolidated Plan/Annual Action Plan.

# Formal Public Comment Periods and Publications of Plans and Reports

The Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plans, or substantial amendments to them, are available in draft form for public comment at least 30 days before they are due to be approved by the McDowell County Board of Commissioners. The draft will be publicly noticed on the Foothills NC HOME Consortium webpage (link above) and a printed copy is available upon request from the Foothills NC HOME Consortium staff, and at the reception desk of the McDowell County government office located at 69 N Main St., Marion, NC. The CAPER is made available for comment at least 15 days before submittal to HUD. The draft CAPER will be posted on the Foothills NC HOME Consortium website as well as available on request.

Citizen written comments made during these periods are taken into consideration and may be reproduced or referenced in the Consolidated Plan.

# Foothills NC HOME Consortium Council

The Foothills NC HOME Consortium Council consists of representatives from 12 units of government from the 4 county Consortium area of McDowell, Cleveland, Polk, and Rutherford counties. The Consortium’s Council, representative of the member governments, sets policy and oversees the management of the HOME program. One of its primary functions is to make recommendations to the McDowell County Board of Commissioners for the annual allocation of HOME funds in the Annual Action Plan.

The Council will meet biannually or more if needed. All meetings are open to the public. Meeting materials are emailed before each meeting to the Consortium Council members and will be available on the Foothills NC HOME Consortium web page (link above).

# Public Access to Records

In accordance with North Carolina state law, the Consortium’s housing and community development records are open to the public. Exceptions are records that contain personal identifying information and most financial information about individuals who are assisted through the programs. Requests to access records other than published plans and reports should be made through email and should be sufficiently.

precise to enable staff to identify the specific records that are needed. Please submit your request to Penny Martinez, Senior Planner/HOME Program Manager at [pmartinez@foothillsregion.org](mailto:pmartinez@foothillsregion.org)

# Complaints and Grievances

Written or oral complaints or grievances concerning the Consolidated Planning process and HOME programs should be addressed to the Foothills NC HOME Consortium Program Manager, attention Penny Martinez. The department will make every effort to respond within 10 working days. Written responses will be mailed within 15 working days of receiving a written complaint or grievance. Should the complainant not be satisfied, the complainant may arrange a meeting with the HOME Program Manager to discuss the matter. Any citizen may contact, or address City or County elected officials at their regularly scheduled meetings during the allotted public comment period.

# Process for Participation in the Five-Year Consolidated Plan

The Consolidated Plan, or Con Plan, first developed in 2021, is revised every five years, although it may be amended in the interim. It identifies and prioritizes housing needs in the area covered by the Consortium and develops long-term objectives and strategies for addressing them.

Before the adoption of the Five-Year Consolidated Plan or the Annual Action Plan, the Foothills NC HOME Consortium staff will make available to citizens, public agencies, interested parties, and to the larger public information about the plan.

In order to maximize citizen participation in this important planning process, there will be public hearings as well as a formal public comment period. During the planning process, there will be several public meetings, surveys, social media campaigns, press releases, and updates to the Consortium webpage.

The aim will be to have a draft Five-Year Consolidated Plan largely completed by March of the calendar year before it is due to be submitted (usually May/June of the corresponding year) so that its priorities and objectives can be reflected in the evaluation of funding requests for the coming year.

The draft Five-Year Consolidated Plan will be reviewed by the Consortium Council, published for citizen comment, along with the Action Plan for the coming year, and discussed in public hearings, before being approved by the McDowell County Board of Commissioners and being submitted to HUD.

# Amendment of the 5-Year Consolidated Plan/Annual Action Plan

Minor and technical amendments to consolidated plans may be made without seeking citizen participation; however, the following are considered substantial amendments:

1. Addition of a new activity of priority
2. Cancellation of activity or deletion of a priority
3. A change in the nature of an activity, its location, or its target population, such that different persons will be impacted by it
4. A change of more than 50% in the amount of funds allocated to an activity.

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners must approve all substantial amendments. Notice of the proposed amendment and public hearing will be advertised at the discretion of the McDowell County

Board of Commissioners and the precedent in place from previous hearings. Public comments received before and during the public hearing are considered by the Board of Commissioners before approving or denying the amendment.

# Contingency Operations during a declared local, state, and/or national emergency:

In the event of a local, state, and/or national declaration of emergency or any similar crisis or safety declaration, the public participation process will remain a hybrid of online submission of comments and public hearings. The public hearing process will be at the discretion of the McDowell County Board of Commissioners and the County Manager.

# Appendix A- Definitions/Acronyms

Annual Action Plan: The document that describes the needs, resources, priorities, and proposed activities to be undertaken over a one-year period with respect to HUD programs, including HOME as a part of the 5 Year Consolidated Plan.

Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing (AI): a comprehensive review of impediments to fair housing choice in the public and private sections within a particular jurisdiction.

Five-Year Consolidated Plan: Also referred to as the Consolidated Plan, is a document that serves as the planning document (comprehensive housing affordability strategic and community development plan) of the jurisdiction and an application for funding under any of the Community Planning and Development formula grant programs, which is prepared in accordance with the process prescribed in 24 CFR Part 91. The plan describes needs, resources, priorities, and proposed activities to be undertaken over a five-year period with respect to HUD programs.

Consolidated Annual Performance Evaluation Report (CAPER): The document that provides HUD with the necessary information to assess each grantee’s ability to carry out its programs in compliance with applicable regulations and requirements and describes the grantee’s program achievements to its citizens. The CAPER is submitted to HUD annually at the conclusion of the program year.

Participating Jurisdiction (PJ): A locality or state that receives HOME Funds. McDowell County , Lead Entity in partnership with Cleveland, Polk and Rutherford counties, and nine of the municipalities within, are the representative governments in which the Foothills NC HOME funds are awarded and administered.

Substantial Amendment: An amendment of revision for the Five-Year Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan and is one which includes the addition of a new activity or priority; a change in the nature of an activity, its location, or its target population such that different citizens will be impacted by it; or a change in more than 50% of the funds allocated.

# Appendix B- Key Partners

The Foothills NC HOME Consortium shall maintain a list of local and area organizations representing the following:

* For-profit and non-profit developers
* Neighborhood associations
* Community development organizations
* Transportation department and planners
* Workforce and economic development agencies
* Chambers of Commerce
* Departments of Planning, Police, Fire, Public Works, Code Enforcement, Economic Development, and Recreation
* Foundations
* Key institutional employers (including hospitals, universities, community colleges, etc.)
* Non-profit organizations representing populations for which AFH, AI, and Consolidated Plan regulations require special emphasis:
  + Low-and moderate-income persons
  + Non-English-speaking persons
  + Persons with disabilities
  + Public housing residents
  + Special needs populations