

# Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council

## **Meeting for Public Comment on 2<sup>nd</sup> Round Disaster Recovery Funds**

2:00 p.m.  
Wednesday, August 11, 2010  
LRGVDC Transit Center  
510 S. Pleasantview Dr.  
Weslaco, Texas

**LRGVDC Staff: Kenneth N. Jones, Executive Director  
Marcie Oviedo, Director of Regional Planning  
Manuel Cruz, Director of Homeland Security  
Ludy Saenz, Program Administer  
Valerie Ramos, Technician**

## LRGVDC PUBLIC HEARING SUMMARY

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A public hearing was held by the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC) at the LRGVDC Transit Center, Weslaco Texas on Wednesday, August 11, 2010 beginning at 2 p.m. A total of 37 people attended the hearing. Present were LRGVDC Executive Director, Ken Jones, Cecil Pennington and Chance Sparks from Texas Department of Rural Affairs (TDRA), Kevin Hamby from Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA), translator Julio C. Trevino, and LRGVDC Staff.

### **FREEDOM of INFORMATION ACT:**

Advertisements and Public Service Announcements were sent to all local media (newspaper, TV, radio, etc.) plus housing groups, social services entities, water groups, and non-profit organizations. The notice was also posted on the LRGVDC website and on the Secretary of the State.

### **PUBLIC HEARING - DISASTER RECOVERY FUNDING ORIENTATION:**

Mr. Jones welcomed everyone present and reminded them that written comments were due on Friday, August 20, 2010 by 5:00 p.m. at the LRGVDC Office. He then summarizes the Method of Distribution (MOD) 2<sup>nd</sup> Round of Funding referring everyone to the presentation handouts. He mentioned that the timeline has been approved by TDRA as part of the Citizen Participation Plan. He stated that the total allocation for the 2<sup>nd</sup> round was approximately \$185 million. The total housing amount was \$122,034,387. and out of that total amount there was approximately \$107 million for general housing and \$15.1 million for the affordable rental program. Mr. Jones added a reminder that the affordable rental program (\$15.1 million) was funding dollars allocated to the three (3) county COG region for that program, but in this case those that anticipate being eligible are to submit applications and apply directly to the state, TDHCA. Those dollars and applications will not be going through the council governments for review. The \$107 million is different; the Development Council in the proposed MOD is the grant recipient. Recap on HUD Disaster Recovery funds, Round 1 and Round 2. \$55 million was used in Round 1 and if added to Round 2 it equals to a little over \$240 million for both rounds. In December, the MOD was submitted and met the state deadline and from that time to now the State has been awaiting HUD's final approval. Changes have been made, but the Rio Grande Valley fared well by not losing dollars from the recommendation from the TRDA. The changes that did occur resulted from the requirements that transpired in the conciliation agreement executed by the State and housing advocate groups. As outlined in the Conciliation Agreement the State was able to release 33% of our allocation and a balance should be available once TDHCA completes and announces the Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Study. HUD and the State would like to know how we would allocate the 33%. What is being recommended and is out for public comment, is that out of the \$61 million currently released that \$58,981,527. be allocated to Regional Drainage Projects that were identified back in December which are essentially a priority that was approved by the COG Board. Mr. Jones then referred everyone to the Project List and said that 100% for drainage is still available. Also mentioned that the MOD has a description of each project and is available on the website.

**NON-HOUSING ALLOCATION FUNDS:**

Mr. Jones also explained the non-housing funding category. The difference between the \$58 million allocated for the non-housing and the \$61 million available for the 1<sup>st</sup> Phase, the LRGVDC is recommending that remaining amount be applied to housing components so it can give the LRGVDC an opportunity to move forward to procure a management firm to assist us in managing the approximate \$107 million. This would allow the LRGVDC to get preliminary activities out of the way in terms of developing a process to do an assessment of need as a result of Hurricane Dolly, provide recommendations to the COG Board of Directors in terms of recommending allocations on distribution of \$107 million. The specifics of that distribution would be a part of the next Phased MOD, also requiring public participation process.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

**Gerald Gathright, (Boys and Girls Club of Harlingen):**

My name is Gerald Gatheright and I'm the Executive Director for the Boys and Girls Club in Harlingen. I am not sure if I am at the right venue, but the folks that we have been working with from the social services advised me to come to this meeting. We did receive some initial funding for equipment supplies through a social service grant from Hurricane Dolly funds. I'm not sure how these funds fit into social services, but if they do, we would certainly recommend not just for our organization, but other organizations like ours to be considered. It looks like it is mostly for drainage which no question is great, but also people are very important and I'm here representing the people especially the young people. That is all I want to recommend, if I'm out of order for this particular funding, I apologize, but I was advised that this was probably the venue to recommend. Thank you and like I said you have done a great deal to help us in expediting things and working on projects.

**Humberto Garza, (Chief Admin. – Hidalgo County – Pct. #2):**

I would first of all like to say thank you to the Board and all members for their time and effort and every one that participated in this long process. This has been a long a tedious battle which we embarked on some time ago. I think that in this last two and a half years we have gotten to know each other more, specifically our areas with concerns. I think we can all agree that we are doing some things right and we can only hope that we will continue in that progress. On behalf of Hidalgo Pct. #2, I would like to say we are in support of the plans being put in effect. Again I want to say thank you to each and every one of you for all your hard work.

**Armando Garza, (Proyecto Azteca,):**

Today I'm here representing Proyecto Azteca which is a self owned housing program which has created successful home owners in our colonias for Hidalgo County. I'm also here on behalf of Ann Cass, Executive Director for Proyecto Azteca, who was not able to attend today. I have also come to comment on some concerns and make some recommendations regarding the housing portion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> round supplemental disaster recovery funds. First of all I would like to address the AI, Proyecto Azteca and the equal housing people's voice believe that it is very important to get an accurate assessment that colonia residents not only be interviewed, but have the opportunity to give input in this study. Not including residential colonias would be a great mistake and lead to a completely inaccurate assessment of the damages caused by Hurricane

Dolly. We are aware that getting this information from colonia residents can be a challenge. As we worked several months on the Census we were reminded that colonial residents have general mistrust for outsiders. People provide their own security fences, gates, vicious dogs, and their own common sense on not answering the door to strangers. This means that anybody not recognized in the community is going to have a difficult time talking to colonia families. We strongly encourage and recommend the firm chosen by TDHCA for the AI to reach out to all organizations as well as other community based organizations that are recognized by colonia families to assist in their efforts. I would like for the record, to state that Proyecto Azteca nor any of the organizations within equal housing, has not endorsed nor is supporting any firm's proposal. I find it unscrupulous and misleading for any firm to have represented that any member or organization of the housing coalition has endorsed any firm. We still remain as previously stated to the COG and the housing committee committed to working with any group selected by the COG. It's been our experience that it does not make much sense to build and repair homes in areas that continue to flood. It seems logic to focus on areas where drainage is being improved. We would hope that areas such as coloinas LJ, North of Alamo and more in San Juan which were recently hit again with flood waters from Hurricane Alex, would be one of the areas to address with drainage improvements. If not then we would have to reconsider relocating families which is an eligible activity, but would be a difficult task to accomplish. We should focus these efforts in an intelligent and logical matter. Again I would like to remind everyone Proyecto Azteca, remains on assisting the COG, the Housing Advisory Committee, and the firm selected to administer these funds as well as the firm conducting the Analysis of Impediment Study. We are ready to help in any way possible and we are available to assist in any way that we can. Thank you.

**Kevin Hamby, (TDHCA):**

I'm Senior Council for Disaster Recovery Division, as you well know we have a long history with the organization TDHCA. We have people in the field doing some work; the consultant that we hired is South West Fair Housing Council. Their intention is working with people from colonias. They intend to come back in the last part of this month; I believe the 24<sup>th</sup> thru the 27<sup>th</sup>, specifically on outreach.

**Arturo Prida, (City of Rio Hondo):**

Good afternoon my name is Arturo Prida and I am representing the City of Rio Hondo. The Texas Department of Rural Affairs has initiated the distribution of Round 2 of the Disaster Recovery funds. I wish to confirm that the City of Rio Hondo has decided to be the direct recipient of this drainage project funding. According to the decision of the LRGVDC Board, Rio Hondo is to receive assistance for drainage improvements to solve the severe drainage problems we face, and thereby to avoid the recurrence of damages that Hurricane Dolly caused in our community. Thank you for the opportunity and your support for the Method of Distribution. We do wait with great anticipation to the development of this badly needed project.

**America Gonzalez, (Mayor of Santa Rosa):**

Good afternoon my name is America Gonzalez, Mayor from the City of Santa Rosa. First of all I would I like to thank the LRGVDC for the second round of the funding. We also would like to be the recipient of the drainage project for Santa Rosa. Santa Rosa is very much capable of administering this grant.

**Emily Rickers, (Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid):**

Please see attached comments provided by Ms. Rickers.

**Diana Serna, (Hidalgo Urban County):**

Good afternoon, first of all I would like to thank the Development Council staff for taking this project on. I know it has been quit tedious and I know it has taken us a long time to get to this point. I know Ms. Ricker had her comments regarding the public not being here, but this process started back in October 2009. All of the cities were invited; citizens were invited to talk about their need. I'm just happy at this point to know, even though I don't agree with what HUD is doing to us regarding the allocation, but I do agree with the fact that \$59million dollars will be set aside for drainage. I work with the housing program in Hidalgo County for the Urban County Program and I know that there is a need for housing, but I also see that I cannot waste federal dollars on improving a house knowing that it could flood within a week. I am for the drainage improvement projects and even though we don't have all the money to do all 15 projects, if there is cost under runs then maybe we will be able to continue others. In the mean time we hope and pray that the federal government will allow the State to move some money around if need be. I do know that the \$104 million dollars set aside for housing is important to us. I see this day in and day out; I want to help as many people as possible. I continue to be supportive of this plan; to know that this money will come our way and do some good. I certainly hope Federal HUD and the State allows using the remaining \$104 million for housing in phase 2 as one big project, so that all non-profit agencies can continue to provide housing assistance to residents who were affected by Hurricane Dolly.

**Ken Jones:**

There being no further questions or comments, Mr. Jones adjourned the hearing.

**Ended the Public Meeting at approximately 3:30 PM**