

City Seeks Input on \$21 Million in Affordable Housing Grants, Related Programs

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The City of San Antonio has three months to decide how it will use more than \$21 million in affordable housing project grants from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development next year.

“This is the first time that we’ve received a significant increase in the allocation in a very long time,” said Verónica Soto, director of the City’s Neighborhood and Housing Services Department, on Wednesday. For the fiscal year 2018, the City received \$19.5 million in HUD grants.



Tarps cover the roofs of houses in need of repair on the Westside. SCOTT BALL / RIVARD REPORT

Soto gave the City Council’s five-member Comprehensive Planning Committee an overview of how the City department could use the money. The final request must be approved by Council and submitted to the federal agency by Aug. 15, she said, and the community will have several opportunities to weigh in on how the funds should be used.

One group, [the COPS/Metro Alliance](#), wants \$6.5 million allocated to owner-occupied rehabilitation projects, about \$3 million more than the proposed \$3.7 million. COPS/Metro representatives said that would fulfill what they consider a previous commitment made by several [City Council members campaigning in April 2017](#).

The more than \$21 million in grants comes from a variety of federal programs: about \$13 million comes through Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, \$5.5 million from HOME Investment Partnership Program funds, \$1 million from Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) funds, and \$1.6 million from Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) funds. Each of the different federal programs received an increase of funding in this year’s allotment.

Local housing department staff made recommendations about how to use the money based on community input contained in a four-year [priorities plan](#) created in 2015, Soto said. Of the five priorities listed, the first focuses on providing “decent, safe, affordable housing.”

The housing department recommends that approximately \$5.2 million from CDBG funds should be dedicated to affordable housing development. Another \$3.7 million should be for owner-occupied rehabilitation initiatives paid for with \$1.5 million in CDBG funds, \$1.5 million in HOME funds, and another \$688,000 from CDBG specifically for minor repair programs, according to staff recommendations.

While generally receptive to the proposals, some Council members asked staff to make changes. Councilwoman Shirley Gonzales (D5) said she would like to see more funds dedicated to owner-occupied rehabilitation that focuses on repairing foundations and electrical components in existing homes. Most people own their homes in District 5, she said, and most of the housing stock was built before the 1970s.

“We have a tremendous need for owner-occupied rehab,” Gonzales said.

COPS/Metro members said that they now understand that funding for 2018 owner-

occupied projects, described as totaling about \$6.5 million, actually included projects that had been funded in previous years’ budgets but had not yet been completed. The actual 2018 contribution totaled nearly \$2 million, drawing \$1.5 million from HOME funds and \$330,000 from CDBG funds.

“We ask that you consider \$6.5 million for new applications in the 2019 budget, and that those funds be allocated specifically for owner occupied housing rehab,” said Maria Tijerina, co-chair of COPS/Metro. Soto said COPS/Metro misunderstood a statement made last year by City staff that \$6.5 million would be dedicated to owner-occupied rehabilitation programs in 2018.

“The misunderstanding is that they thought it was new money, when it wasn’t,” Soto told the *Rivard Report* Wednesday afternoon. “From our side, we didn’t elaborate that it was to serve families that were already in the queue.”

The 2019 allotment currently doubles the amount of money dedicated for owner-occupied rehabilitation. Other Council members voiced concerns, but decided to wait for more public input and discussion before making any changes.

The first public input meeting on allocating funding is scheduled for Wednesday, June 13, at 6 p.m. in the City Council Chambers, 114 W. Commerce St. The second of three public hearing will be scheduled for sometime in July, with a third meeting on Aug. 1.

Starting May 20, the community may submit recommendations by phone, 210-207-6600, or email, communitydevelopment@sanantonio.gov.



Neighborhood & Housing Services Department Director Verónica Soto describes the challenges of affordable housing to City Council in August 2017. BONNIE ARBITTIER / RIVARD REPORT

CORRECTION: This article’s headline has been updated to reflect that not all grants go directly to affordable housing. Soto’s response to COPS/Metro has also been updated for clarity.