



# *Town of Brookline*

## *Massachusetts*

**Department of Planning and  
Community Development**

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### **Substantial Amendment**

#### **Town of Brookline – FY 2020 (FFY 19) CDBG Annual Action Plan**

#### **April 16, 2020**

To address urgent needs arising as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Town of Brookline, MA has prepared a Substantial Amendment to its Fiscal Year 2020 (Federal Fiscal Year 19) Annual Action Plan (AAP). The AAP amendment would allow the Town to reprogram up to \$75,000 in unexpended FY 20 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to the Brookline Center for Community Mental Health (BCCMH) in support of the Safety Net Program.

The Town's CDBG Citizen Participation Plan necessitates the preparation of an amendment to the AAP when there is a change in allocation priorities or a change in the method of distribution of CDBG funds. Given the urgent nature of the reallocation, and in light of temporary changes to citizen participation and funding allocations allowed by the March 27, 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), the Town will:

- hold an expedited five day public comment period for the substantial amendment
- exceed the 15 percent cap on public services normally required by the CDBG program

The Town published a legal notice in the Brookline TAB with an initial run date of 4/16/2020. The notice provides a description of the proposed amendment and invites public feedback over the expedited five day public comment period, which ends on 4/21/2020. The process will culminate at a virtual public hearing conducted by the Brookline Select Board on 4/21/2020, after which the Board will vote to approve the proposed amendment after allowing for public comment.

#### **OVERVIEW**

The COVID-19 virus has resulted in an epidemic occurring worldwide, crossing international boundaries and affecting a large number of people. On March 10, 2020, to address the need to slow the spread of the coronavirus, Governor Baker declared a state of emergency. Shortly after, the Town of Brookline declared

a state of emergency and, like the Commonwealth, enacted regulations on businesses to advance social distancing. On March 27, 2020, the President declared a Major Disaster Declaration for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, DR-4496, related to the COVID-19 pandemic response.

As a result of the pandemic, Brookline residents and businesses, like countless others across the globe, are facing catastrophe. Town staff and social service agencies have consistently reported on the ongoing impacts on community members who have lost jobs and income. Right now, there are residents who lack the financial means to pay for basic necessities, such as food and utilities. Many of the Town's small businesses will be closed for an undetermined amount of time, leading to layoffs and furloughs due to unsustainable loss of business.

The existing resources available to help individuals and families are limited, and the current need greatly exceeds availability. As the need continues to grow, local resources will be severely strained. And as great as the present need is, it is feared that long term unemployment and the eventual sunset of short-term protections against eviction and foreclosure will exacerbate the crises many people currently face.

### **RATIONALE FOR SUBSTANTIAL AMENDMENT TO FY 2020 AAP**

In the time since the Town submitted its FY 20 CDBG AAP to HUD in May 2019, the world has witnessed the gradual onset of global health and financial crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. These crises are ever-evolving and will likely last well into the future. To get ahead of the growing negative effects of the pandemic and to stave off as many health-related, housing and financial crises as possible, the Town has determined that available CDBG funding should be used to augment the capabilities of the BCCMH through the Safety Net program.

BCCMH staff report a four-fold increase in inquiries for emergency assistance through the Safety Net program over the past several weeks. These included recently laid-off workers, students, and seniors who found themselves suddenly without a place to live. Staff note that they are receiving requests from many Brookline community members who have never previously sought help and from vulnerable neighbors faced with urgent new challenges. Those who provide services community-wide believe that these requests are just the beginning of a much larger wave to come.

The Safety Net Fund was designed for moments like this. Established more than 20 years ago by the Brookline Community Foundation, the Safety Net acts as a nimble resource for neighbors in crisis, providing small, rapid-response grants that keep food on the table, families safely housed, and other urgent needs met. CDBG funds will augment the Safety Net, and will be administered by staff from the BCCMH on behalf of the Town to meet growing urgent needs. CDBG funding will ensure that the BCCMH has adequate staffing and funds to be used direct assistance to meet the current and ongoing funding needs of those facing unexpected myriad crises.

The FY 2020 Annual Action Plan amendment will provide up to \$75,000 in FY 2020 (FFY 2019) CDBG funding to bolster the number of individuals and families that can be served by the Safety Net. CDBG funds will be used to create both staffing capacity and to provide immediate assistance around housing and other basic subsistence needs as allowed under the CDBG Urgent Need National Objective.

It is expected that an additional allotment of CDBG funding allocated to the Town of Brookline as part of the Cares Act will be programmed to the Brookline Safety net under a second substantial amendment.