

Community Development Block Grant for Economic Development
(CDBG-ED-MVP)
PUBLIC HEARING

January 13, 2005

PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES

PRESENT: John H. Tramburg, Susan Martin, Harlan Baumgartner, Robert L. Hamele,
Mark A. Witt, Lois Schepp, Walter Meinholz, Louis Tessman, and Cindy Devine

Tramburg called the public hearing to order at 1:30 p.m., as advertised by Public Notice in the Daily Register and posted at the Arlington Village Hall.

The purpose of this Public Hearing was to provide the citizens of Columbia County an update regarding the Community Development Block Grant for Economic Development (CDBG-ED-MVP) program, discussion of the economic development needs of Columbia County, and to receive citizen input relating to the Blue Star Dairy Farms \$450,000 CDBG-ED project.

Schepp provided a project recap, noting that the \$450,000 CDBG-ED grant represented a small portion of the entire Blue Star Dairy Farms project, which totaled over \$6.5 million. The \$450,000 was used to purchase 900 dairy cows.

Walter Meinholz of Blue Star Dairy Farms reported on the status of his facilities, including the number of full time employees (38 between the three facilities), production rate (not as high as expected due to a reduction in the additive used to boost milk production), and the potential to build another facility to accommodate new heifers. When asked about any feedback from his neighbors or environmental concerns, Meinholz stated that the dairy had held an open house and received generally positive responses. He also noted that due to adequate land and space, and the aeration process used by the dairy, they were able to minimize odor and manure disposal.

Louis Tessman of Pacific Township voiced concerns about various aspects of the project. He mentioned well-known odor problems found at dairy farms, and questioned the grant program, where the new employees came from, the lack of promotion of smaller dairy farms, absentee landowners, increased truck traffic, and whether any economic development actually occurred as a result of this project. He questioned whether funds were available for other types of business, including independent hog producers or other businesses.

Schepp and other RLF/Housing Committee members addressed Tessman's concerns, noting that Columbia County was the administrator of the grant, not the originator of the program itself. It was noted that Blue Star was required to comply with all terms of the grant program. Department of Commerce contact information was offered to Mr. Tessman.

Meinholz also responded to Tessman's concerns, noting that smaller dairies had also received program dollars, and that the grant dollars are actually loans that are paid back - including interest. The program is designed to help make dairy expansion possible in Wisconsin. He further stated that employees/positions created vary from farm to farm, and earn anywhere from \$27,000 to \$45,000/year. Because Blue Star is located on the Dane/Columbia County border, some employees do come from Dane instead of Columbia County.

The Columbia County CDBG program history and other Revolving Loan Fund options were described. Once CDBG funds are repaid, the dollars are available for other business areas.

The hearing was closed at 2:10 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Robert L. Hamele, Secretary

Cindy Devine, Recording Secretary

Cc: RLF/Housing Committee
Lois Schepp
Joseph Ruf III
Jeanne Miller
Internet