

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
CITY COUNCIL

TO: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
FROM: CALUHA BARNES, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
DANIELLE RONSHAUSEN, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
COORDINATOR
SUBJECT: FY 2017-18 COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT GRANT
APPLICATION APPEALS

AGENDA ACTION: MOTION

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by the Office of Community Engagement and the Community Advisory Board that the Council, by motion, deny all FY 2017-18 Community Improvement Grant application appeals submitted on behalf of the Greater Cherry Street Neighborhood Association.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On July 31, 2017, the Community Advisory Board (CAB) received 48 Community Improvement Grant Applications, totaling \$180,237, for FY 2017-18. After reviewing each application, the CAB made final award decisions on September 27, 2017. The CAB selected nine projects to receive funding this fiscal year, totaling \$31,483. Following the funding decision, the CAB received 17 application appeals from a Mr. Eric Fraser (Appellant) on behalf of the Greater Cherry Street Neighborhood Association (GCSNA). After meeting with staff on February 20, 2018, the Appellant sent an email to staff indicating he did not want to move forward with 12 of the 17 application appeals, effectively withdrawing them. The Appellant is requesting reconsideration of the remaining five applications, totaling \$16,000.

BACKGROUND

The authorization for the Community Improvement Grants is provided in Resolution 28686, dated September 15, 2015, which directs that the CAB shall oversee the issuance of a public grant application solicitation; review all grant applications submitted; and award grants to applicants whose projects best meet the criteria of the grant program.

There are two categories of criteria for grant awards – public improvements and community events, which are described briefly below:

- Public Improvements include physical construction/improvement projects located within one of the seven areas from which CAB members were selected prior to Council adoption of districts, and are to represent: north, northeast, northwest, south, southeast, southwest, and central core.
- Community Events include practices and events that create or enhance the sense of community among individuals with a regional area or within a group that shares a common interest.

The Community Improvement Grant (CIG) program is a reimbursement-based program that also requires a 100% match, cash, in-kind donations, or services, of the amount requested from CIG program.

From the inception of the CAB, Council annually allocated \$35,000 for the grant program, until FY 2007-2008. At that time, with revenue declining as a result of the economic downturn, and the unawarded balance in the grant account created by allocations outpacing expenditures, Council made no new allocations for the grant Program. The historic underspending persisted despite there being no grant maximum during this period. The average grant amount was approximately \$1,000 with the maximum grant amount of \$8,500 to a single applicant, based on records located by staff. Council directed the CAB spend the funds down before any new allocations would be considered. Over time, interest in the program remained relatively constant, with an average of 26 applications per grant cycle, and with 37 being the highest number received in any grant cycle, until this year.

For the FY 2017-18 CIG Program cycle, the CAB increased the maximum grant amount to \$5,000 and received 48 applications, totaling \$180,237. Twenty of the applications were submitted by the Appellant on behalf of the GCSNA, totaling \$82,625 in requested funds.

AWARD DETERMINATION

Staff receives the grant applications and reviews them for completeness, eligibility and follow-up, as appropriate. Follow-up includes questions relating to incomplete answers in the application, clarifying questions about specific responses in the application, and/or missing information and/or clarification about the proposed budget. For projects that involve other City departments, staff contacts the respective department(s) to ensure that applicants have received permission and/or appropriate permits for their projects. As required by Resolution No. 28686, the CAB is provided all of the applications for review, regardless of eligibility concerns identified upon initial review by staff.

In addition to the CAB's review of the written grant applications, applicants are offered the option to make a 5-minute presentation of their project to the CAB at either the August or September meeting. Since the presentations are optional, they have no weight in the CAB's decision-making process so as not to disadvantage those who elect

not to present. Twenty (20) applicants chose to present, including the Appellant, who was allowed 10 minutes to present his multiple projects.

Following the presentations at the September 27th general meeting, the CAB chose nine projects for funding, totaling \$31,483, using the evaluation criteria contained in the grant application (Attachment 2) and summarized below:

1. Project supports community building, strengthening neighborhoods, and relationship building among residents through public improvement projects and events.
2. Volunteers and project partners are a significant component of the process.
3. Applications should reference partnering organizations, individuals and associations involved.
4. Projects must have clear neighborhood and community support. Support may be demonstrated through letters of support or petition.
5. Project budget should be well thought out, reasonable, and realistic.
6. Geographical or social sphere of influence – description of how many people benefit from the project.
7. Projects should reflect environmental consciousness.
8. Projects must be broadly accessible as possible and of no charge to participants.

Staff notified each applicant of the CAB's decision through letters mailed out the week of October 3rd. However, due to the wildfire disaster, staff learned that some applicants apparently never received their letters. This was the case for the GCSNA and staff was notified by the Appellant via email on November 20th that he did not receive the CAB's written decisions regarding his applications. On December 20th, staff received 17 appeals on behalf of the GCSNA. Staff met with the Appellant on February 20, 2018¹ to discuss the appeals and during this discussion, staff was advised of the decision to withdraw 12 of 17 the appeals. The remaining five appeals, totaling \$16,000 are for the following projects:

1. #1701 – Sidewalk Condition Survey (1 application for \$4,000)
2. #1702 – Sidewalk Info Pack (1 application for \$1,000)
3. #1703 – Verge Remediation (1 application for \$5,000)
4. #1718 – Community Dog Walker Info Pack (1 application for \$1,000)
5. #1720 – GCSNA Communications (1 application for \$5,000)

The City Attorney's Office reviewed the appeals and directed staff to add the appeals to a future Council agenda for review and consideration. This is the matter before Council today.

¹ The appeals had been scheduled for Council consideration at the February 27, 2018, but was delayed following the February 20th meeting with the Appellant during which he requested more time and indicated that he was reducing the number of application being appealed from 17 to five.

PRIOR CITY COUNCIL REVIEW

There have been no prior Council reviews on the submitted appeals.

ANALYSIS

In the letters of appeal (Attachment 1), the Appellant indicated that the GCSNA “did not receive a fair hearing from the CAB”, saying that the CAB “appeared not to have the time, patience, willingness, or professional training to consider” his applications. Specifically, the Appellant complains of not enough presentation time for his 20 applications, despite being granted 5 minutes more than any other applicant, due to his numerous projects. He also expressed that the GCSNA was not satisfied with the CAB’s reasoning for why their applications were not approved for funding, which was stated as follows:

“This year the Community Advisory Board (CAB) received a record 48 grant applications for projects totaling approximately \$180,000. With projects ranging from school-based community gardens, to training on community organizing, to community events, the CAB was very pleased with the extremely high level of interest and the variety of projects. With only \$30,000 available for grant awards, many of the projects could not be funded.”

The CAB reviewed each of Appellant’s applications prior to the grant decision-making meeting. Each CAB Member was given a copy of all GCSNA applications to review in August in advance of the meeting. Staff also supplied the CAB with the written responses to the follow-up questions presented to the Appellant. Although one of the Appellant’s complaints is related to insufficient time to present all of his grants, the presentations are optional and do not factor into the decision so as not to disadvantage applicants who elect not to present.

Using the evaluation criteria stated above, staff and later the CAB, determined that applications 1701 – 1715 (withdrawn appeals) were not eligible for funding. These applications were for sidewalk assessments, reporting of findings from the sidewalk assessments to residents in the Cherry Street neighborhood, and sidewalk repairs, which per Council Policy 13-32.020, Maintenance and Repair of Sidewalks, are the responsibility of the property owner.

During the subject grant cycle, the CAB was faced for the first time with requests that were nearly 6 times the amount of available funding, having received 48 applications totaling \$180,237. Based on the funding limitations, the CAB were forced to reject projects that may have been approved had funding not been a constraint. Projects were selected that most clearly indicated community support and involvement, that provided engagement opportunities, and evidence of the required financial match.

FISCAL IMPACT

By upholding the CAB's decision on the Greater Cherry Street Neighborhood Association applications, the Council will prevent an additional general fund expenditure of \$16,000 in the current fiscal year. The Office of Community Engagement does not have available funding to award the \$16,000 requested for appealed grant projects from currently budgeted funds. If awarded, this allocation would further exacerbate the strain on the general fund deficit.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

This action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because it is not a project which has a potential for resulting in either a direct physical change in the environment, or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment, pursuant to CEQA Guideline section 15378.

BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended by the Community Advisory Board that the Council, by motion, deny all FY 2017-18 Community Improvement Grant application appeals currently submitted by Appellant on behalf of the Greater Cherry Street Neighborhood Association.

NOTIFICATION

Notification for this hearing was published in the Press Democrat on August 24, 2018.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1 – Appeal Letters
- Attachment 2 – Community Improvement Grant Application
- Attachment 3 – Greater Cherry Street Neighborhood Association Grant Applications 1701 – 1703, 1718, and 1720
- Attachment 4 – List of FY 2017-18 Community Improvement Grant Applicants
- Attachment 5 – Submitted by Appellant

CONTACT

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