

TOWN OF BRANCHVILLE  
COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES  
MAY 19, 2014

The Town Council held a special meeting at 6 p.m. Monday, May 19, 2014, at Town Hall. Public notice was posted at Town Hall and provided to The Times and Democrat newspaper.

Mayor Pro Tem Tom Jennings called the meeting to order in the absence of Mayor Glenn Miller. He led in the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance and offered a prayer.

Mayor Pro Tem Jennings gave the roll call. Councilmen Sam Whisenhunt, Gregory Oliver and Michael Blankenship were present. Councilwoman Amy Bryant and Councilman Chris Ott were absent.

Mayor Pro Tem Jennings invited Regina Pencile, community development program and housing program manager with the Lower Savannah Council of Governments (LSCOG), to make a presentation on the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program.

The points she covered included the following:

1. CDBG program is funded by the Department of Commerce.
2. There are two application rounds each year: spring (for projects primarily involving water, wastewater and drainage infrastructure) and fall (for projects primarily involving community facilities, neighborhood revitalizations and demolition projects).
3. For the fall application period, the application requests are due in August and the full applications are due in September.
4. Orangeburg County is already set up to apply for CDBGs so a joint application (county and town) for a project should not be too difficult.
5. The first – and sometimes the biggest – challenge for the potential applicant is defining a good project.
6. The second step is making sure the area is eligible for the grant program.
7. Eligibility is based on household income. At least 51 percent of the residences in the project area must be Low to Moderate Income, or LMI. This is determined through a one-page survey of the residents. The entire Town of Branchville is 52.5 percent LMI.
8. At least 80 percent of the residences in the project area must be below the median income for Orangeburg County, which is \$42,700 this year. The benchmarks are calculated and revised annually by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
9. Project areas can be town-wide or targeted to benefit a certain community.
10. The state Department of Commerce will award a COG a 10 percent administrative fee for doing the paperwork: “The headache of managing the grant is on us. We take the full responsibility. We pull it all together.” The COG writes and submits the application. The Town provides COG with the material that the COG requests for the application.
11. CDBGs typically require the applicant to put up a 10 percent local match but that can be accomplished in a variety of ways. It does not have to be solely cash. One example: a water project where many but not all of the beneficiaries qualify for CDBG assistance and the Town uses its 10 percent local match to serve those who do not qualify.

12. The Town can even ask for “a waiver for all or a portion” of the 10 percent match.

In response to various questions from the Councilmen, Ms. Pencile said:

- A wide variety of projects can get approved for a CDBG, such as water and sewer, demolition, minor home repair, etc.
- It's beneficial to all parties for the COG to get involved very early in the process.
- The Council can bring a short list of proposals to Ms. Pencile, who will review the list and advise the Council as to what project has the best chance of being funded.
- A Town generally applies for just one project per application cycle.
- It is the Town's engineer who comes up with the project's estimated price tag that has to be submitted with the application. Construction bids are later in the process.
- There is \$600,000 earmarked for “ready-to-go” projects in South Carolina that have been developed in a way that the Department of Commerce finds satisfactory.
- The burden is on the applicant to show that 51 percent or more of the households are LMI. Often the first attempt at gathering data is to mail questionnaires with the water bills, giving a deadline to reply. If there are too few responses, door-to-door surveying is done. An empty house cannot count as LMI because someone with higher income might move in – unless the house is shown to be dilapidated or otherwise incapable of being used as a residence.

Councilmen said they need some time to discuss with each other what each sees as the Town's top priority.

Several Councilmen inquired about the possibility of getting a CDBG for demolition and/or rehabilitation work. Councilman Blankenship told Ms. Pencile the Town is looking to demolish the old elementary school building or just part of it and rehabilitate the gymnasium.

Ms. Pencile replied, “I'll certainly ask about it.” She said the Department of Commerce's answer likely might “depend on what your intended use is for it.”

Ms. Pencile left a quantity of materials about the application process and gave her business card to each councilman.

Councilman Blankenship thanked Ms. Pencile: “You have been very informative.”

At 6:32 p.m., Councilman Whisenhunt made a motion to adjourn. Councilmen Oliver and Blankenship simultaneously seconded the motion and it was approved.

Respectfully submitted by Clerk of Court Lee Hendren  
in the absence of Town Clerk Jenny Elliott