

Housing rehab increase denied by council

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Farmington Hills City Council listened and commented. But George Roberts still didn't get what he wanted. The veteran Farmington Hills Housing Rehabilitation Loan Board member made an unsuccessful plea Monday night for more money for the housing rehabilitation program, financed by annual federal Community Development Block Grant money.

"It would seem that the rehab program must compete with the capital improvement program and pay administration fees twice on some of its funds," Roberts told the council Monday.

But the city council accepted administrators' recommended distribution of the expected \$297,000 in block grant money for 1988-89.

To Roberts' chagrin, administrators again added \$36,000 expected in repayment of low-interest loans offered through the housing program, to the total CDBG program. That brings the total available for block grant administration, housing rehabilitation and capital improvements in the city's low-moderate-income

areas to \$333,000.

Of that total, \$42,000 will pay for administration, \$191,000 (including \$36,000 in loan repayments) for housing rehabilitation and \$100,000 for capital improvements.

ROBERTS ALSO asked for a reserve fund for home repair grants as well as for the possibility that the CDBG program will be cut in the future. Roberts told the council that housing program guidelines approved by a former city council call for establishment of a reserve fund.

"It does no good to give a person a low-interest loan if he or she can't make any payments or make a deferred loan to a person who can't sell their house in a bad real estate market," Roberts said.

He quoted statistics showing that income levels for low-income families have decreased since 1973 while incomes have increased during that period for those in the higher income categories.

With a reserve fund, the loan board "could buy down the total costs of repairs to a figure he can afford to make payments on," Roberts said.

But the city council decided a reserve fund for grants was unnecessary. They also decided that the housing program, designed to make repairs on houses owned by low and moderate income families, was receiving its fair share of block grant money.

"I think we're at a balance now," councilman Aldo Vagnozzi said.

Capital improvements are necessary because they are improving the older areas of the city along the southeastern border. "I would not like to see capital improvements reduced any more than it is now."

VAGNOZZI SUGGESTED the four-member loan board should approach the city council if it runs out of money to give loan applicants before the end of the fiscal year in June. About 30 loans totaling approximately \$171,900 have been issued for home repairs in the past year.

"I'm concerned that we have already expended 90 percent and we have four months to go," Vagnozzi said.

The councilman also suggested that perhaps the city should help finance administrative costs for the block grant program out of its general fund budget. That deci-

sion would be made at budget time, he said.

Roberts was full of questions Monday. He challenged the \$42,000 allocation for administration. He argued that housing rehabilitation is being charged twice for administration costs on money loaned and repaid. He questioned whether the city pays for engineering costs for scheduled capital improvements rather than using CDBG money.

Assistant city manager Dave Call told council that the \$100,000 allocated for capital improvements will be spent on actual construction. "The city administration is subsidizing capital improvements to the tune of 15 percent," he said.

Capital improvements expected to be made in the low and moderate income areas of the city this year include in priority: sidewalk replacement and installation, storm sewer installation on Rhonwood west of Gill, and drainage improvements on Parker, between Colfax and Folsom.

Any money left over from capital improvements or additional money from the federal government will be given to the housing program, Call said.

Video on housing rehab vying for national award

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

It might not be an Oscar. But it's right up there with the cream of the crop in national awards.

A video documentary on Farmington Hills' housing rehabilitation program is under the scrutinizing eye of the National Endowment for the Arts Council. The program has been nominated for a 1988 Presidential Design Award.

"We're really happy. It's a good project, a good informational project," said Farmington Hills video production supervisor Dave Tietmeyer.

Tietmeyer and former housing specialist Cheryl Carter spearheaded the program, which took about eight weeks to film.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development asked Carter and Tietmeyer to submit the video for the award. HUD distributes federal Community Block Grant money, which supports the city's housing rehabilitation program in low and moderate-income areas.

"The film is a history of CDBG in Farmington Hills. It includes what

The documentary on Farmington Hills' housing rehabilitation program has been nominated for the 1988 Presidential Design Award.

the administration does, what capital improvements do and what housing rehabilitation does," Carter said. "And we have interviews with housing rehabilitation clients."

THE IDEA for the video came from a similar production presented at an annual Michigan Community Developers Association meeting. "We liked what we saw and said we should do something similar," Carter said.

Both Carter and Tietmeyer, however, give credit where it's due. The program opens with remarks about the block grant program by city manager William Costick. The documentary is narrated by former Farmington Hills mayor Ben Marks. Executive producer is Tom Biassell, public services director.

But Tietmeyer filmed the pro-

gram. Armed with information from brochures and newspaper articles about CDBG, Tietmeyer stood behind the cameras and interviewed recipients of the housing program.

"It's more of a documentary style," he said. "I got the brochures and articles and learned some questions and formulated it into a script."

Though Carter and Tietmeyer are excited about the National Endowment of the Arts awards, this isn't the first Farmington Hills video that's up for honors. "We've sent in other videos, like for the 'City Hall Digest' competitions. We've gotten some good responses," Tietmeyer said.

The National Endowment for the Arts won't make a final decision on the CDBG documentary until summer.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Former Farmington Hills housing specialist Dave Tietmeyer use the video production equipment in Farmington Hills city hall.

Loss of housing specialist raises fears of residents

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

It seemed like an echo in the room.

Farmington Hills City Council wanted comments from residents about the proposed distribution of anticipated 1988-89 Community Development Block Grant money. But residents had another topic on their minds. They wanted to know about the recent resignation of housing specialist Cheryl Carter.

"Losing Cheryl Carter is really going to hurt it (the city's housing rehabilitation program)," said Oxford resident Maxine Collins. "Losing Cheryl, someone better open their eyes and see that no one can fill her shoes."

Other residents joined Collins in questioning administrators and city council members on why Carter, who edged the housing program into maturity over the past four years, is leaving. Her resignation was effective March 16.

A complete answer from the city council or administrators was not forthcoming. What was mentioned was that Carter, as she had explained previously, resigned to start her own consulting company.

"I don't want to get into the case-worker situation," councilman Aldo Vagnozzi said, adding that Carter requested a change in her situation.

But the explanations didn't quiet the eight residents sitting in council chambers waiting for an understanding of why the woman they've come to trust is leaving her post.

"SHE'S AN exceptional person in this day and age. The human side of this program . . . it's hard to express," said an elderly resident, who said Carter and the housing program helped her remain independent and keep her own home.

Still another resident lauded Carter's work. "We never had trust

in it (the housing program) until Cheryl Carter was introduced to us," Carol Boyd, a Farmington Hills Housing Rehabilitation Loan Board member, lent a hand in explaining Carter's popularity among residents benefiting from the housing program.

"These people are working people. They're proud. They pay their bills. You can call them the working poor. They don't want to be invaded. They want to be respected. They have dignity," Boyd said.

'Losing Cheryl Carter is really going to hurt it (the city's housing rehab program).'

— Maxine Collins
Oxford resident

When the program was administered by Oakland County in the early 1980s, Boyd continued, caseworkers would slip code violations on the homeowners. That led more and more of the homeowners to avoid asking for help in paying for needed repairs.

"I don't want to get into the case-worker situation," councilman Aldo Vagnozzi said, adding that Carter requested a change in her situation. "I think you have to be very careful . . . I see people coming into the program thinking maybe I can let someone into my home. I don't have to be afraid."

THOUGH CARTER was retained on a part-time basis — at least for

'They've come to trust her. Now there's fear because she's leaving.'

— Carol Boyd
rehab board member

this week — until administrators can find her replacement, she was not asked to attend the public hearing on the 1988-89 federal Community Block Grant money Monday night. Block grant money finances the housing program, which offers low and moderate income families low-interest and deferred loans, as well as grants, to repair and rehabilitate their homes.

In an interview with the Observer almost two weeks ago, Carter said: "It's time to move on. It's a chance for independence."

Her consulting company will set up development programs, including housing rehabilitation. It eventually will branch out into market analysis studies, traffic engineering studies and working with developers as a liaison with communities, Carter said.

"I'm going to miss the people, my clients. This job has turned into a people care. I help them with not only housing needs, but their social needs. I get calls for the homeless and those with no food or clothing," Carter said.

City administrators said they are still uncertain who will replace Carter or whether her job will be handled as a contractual service.

Help for diabetics

Help for diabetics can be obtained by calling the American Diabetes Association-Michigan Affiliate, 552-0480.

The association is a voluntary

health agency, concerned with the detection, care and education of the 250,000 diabetics it serves in Michigan.

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