

Sussex County launches Housing Trust Fund, seeks applicants for affordability grants



Georgetown, Del., March 30, 2022: Sussex County is laying the foundation to building more affordable housing for its citizens.

The County's Community Development & Housing office will begin taking applications Friday, April 1, 2022, from individuals and groups in search of affordable housing options, either through rentals or homeownership. The program, known as the Housing Trust Fund, is the County's latest effort to promote access to and preservation of affordable housing units in Sussex County.

Endorsed by the County Council in fall 2021, the Housing Trust Fund is set to launch with \$6.8 million in funding, with the bulk of that money coming by way of the federal government's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) relief package to Sussex County in response to the coronavirus pandemic. The balance, \$500,000, will come from Sussex County budget funding.

Under the program, qualified individual applicants must meet income eligibility requirements – up to 120 percent of area median income, but with a core focus on those earning under 65 percent of AMI – to tap one-time forgivable loans ranging from \$10,000

to as much as \$30,000 for the purchase of affordable housing. The loans will be pro-rated, with zero percent interest, and forgiven after 10 years of homeownership.

Meantime, a second component of the program, available to developers, groups, and others working toward increasing the county's affordable housing stock, can apply for grants up to \$50,000 – maxing out at \$500,000 per project – for every affordable housing unit built, either as a rental or owner-occupied housing. The units must be marketed toward individuals and households meeting income eligibility requirements, as defined under the Housing Trust Fund program.

“Affordable housing is very much on the minds of the public, and the County Council, for that matter, especially here in Sussex County, where we have a soaring real estate market,” Council President Michael H. Vincent said. “And rightfully so. We all have to live somewhere, and every community needs affordable housing options.

“Hopefully, this program will provide the seed money that working families and housing advocates can use to cultivate an environment of affordability, one that guarantees people can continue to live, work, and play in Sussex County for decades to come,” Mr. Vincent added.

Sussex County, as part of its comprehensive plan adopted in 2018, identified affordable housing as a priority in the development of the county for the next 25 to 30 years. The Housing Trust Fund is an outgrowth of numerous public discussions and meetings with stakeholders, particularly housing advocates, and was among the recommendations made in a 2019 housing study that looked at the affordability issue in southern Delaware, said Brandy B. Nauman, director of the County's Community Development & Housing Office.

“This is a tremendous step for Sussex County, one that I hope will have a meaningful outcome for the countless families and individuals out there looking for quality and affordable housing,” Ms. Nauman said. “I'm proud that the County is stepping up to be a leader in helping to bridge the affordability gap that, left unaddressed, would only grow wider in time.”

Applications for the direct buyers' assistance forgivable loan portion of the program will be accepted beginning April 1, and continue on a rolling basis as long as funding is available; proposals for funding from the development grant fund, meantime, will be accepted in a series of rounds, with the first scheduled to run between April 1 and April 29.

All applications will be reviewed for income eligibility and other requirements. Housing groups or builders applying for the development grant program will be reviewed by the Housing Trust Fund advisory board, with any awards requiring County Council approval.

For more information on the program, visit sussexcountypa.gov/housing-trust-fund.

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