

GET READY FOR CDBGs (continued from page 2)

enty percent (70%) of the funds must benefit a low-to-moderate income population. While CDBG applications are not due until early Spring 2010, the time needed to conduct a survey to determine eligibility, complete needed engineering work, hold public hearings, and collect required documentation can take months of planning and preparation. Thoma has already begun the application process for 2010 for a number of our customers.

For the CDBG application, and all grant applications, it is important for communities to discuss their projects with us ahead of time so that we can work together on the best plan of action. Keeping the lines of communication open between Thoma and our customers is of prime importance to us. We have an overall success rate in assisting our customers in securing CDBG funds of 63%. Please call us so that we can provide you with the competitive grant application edge!

SENNETT COMPLETES COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

A Steering Committee of dedicated Town of Sennett residents, working with Thoma, recently completed the Town's Comprehensive Plan.

Sennett is a small, rural township, with a population of 3,244 persons. It is located in Cayuga County, between the Village of Skaneateles and the City of Auburn. The impetus for Sennett in completing its comprehensive plan was based on burgeoning single family and commercial development and the pressure to convert farmland to other land uses. Much of this pressure emanates from the build out of the City of Auburn and a desire for suburban living.

As noted in the plan, the Town lacks housing choices outside of single family dwelling units which

Sennett wishes to balance. The rapid development of commercial corridors, particularly along Route 5, is also problematic because of the area's visual clutter, lack of green space and pedestrian access, and deficiencies in site plan review. Via a survey conducted of Town residents, there is a strong desire on the part of the community to preserve the Town's agricultural character. A number of goals and implementation measures are detailed in the plan which will help the Town manage change while preserving the rural character of Sennett.

The completed plan is currently undergoing the adoption process. It has received the recommendation of the Cayuga County Planning Department. Upon completion of the required public hearing process, the Town is on course to adopt the plan.



"Partnering with
Communities For a
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Community Visioning

Community Surveys

Comprehensive Planning

Downtown Revitalization

Economic Development

Feasibility Studies

Grant Accounting

Grant Administration

Grant Writing

Historic Preservation

Housing Rehabilitation

Infrastructure Improvements

Lead Clearance Testing

Lead Risk Assessment

Loan Portfolio Management

Market Studies

Microenterprise Assistance

Parks & Trail Development

Records Consulting

Recreation Planning

Strategic Planning

Zoning/Code Revisions

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AGRICULTURAL AND FARMLAND PROTECTION GRANTS

A valuable grant resource available to counties and municipalities is the New York State Department of Ag and Markets' Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan grant. For rural communities looking to conduct a comprehensive review of local land use regulations, the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan grant offers funding that can be used to jump start this process, while at the same time developing a plan to protect farmland from conversion to other uses.



Grant funding may be used for any activities, programs, or strategies intended to promote continued agricultural use in the community. This includes review and revision of the agricultural sections of a local comprehensive plan; review and revision of existing zoning ordinances; evaluating existing or proposed infrastructure plans; and evaluating which land use tools are appropriate in the community to protect agriculture. The grant can also be used to fund Geographic Information System based analyses, such as suitability or build-out analyses, which allows the community to identify those locations most suitable for protection and for development. Public participation is a critical component of any planning process, thus surveys and public input venues are also eligible for funding.

Single municipal applicants can apply for a grant of up to \$25,000 (joint applicants can receive up to \$50,000) to assist the community in

preparing an Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan. Single county applicants can apply for a grant of up to \$50,000 (joint applicants can receive up to \$100,000). Applicants must provide matching funds equal to 25%, including a cash match equal to 20% of the 25% match, and in-kind services.

No deadline exists for the submission of an Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan grant application. Grants are funded on a first come, first served basis until all available funding for the current fiscal year has been awarded. If you think your community would benefit from this resource, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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Many of our customers have found that navigating the maze of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) or “economic stimulus money” is no easy task. Information related to this funding seems to change on a daily basis, prompting a number of calls to our office. Here is a historical perspective of ARRA funds in NYS and what municipalities can do to access them.

As soon as stimulus funding was being discussed as part of the presidential election campaign, states started suggesting ideas on where the money should be spent. The proposed projects and programs fell into the general categories of tax credits, restorative funding, competitive funds, and discretionary funding. Most of the money would be filtered through some 200+ existing programs and some of the funds would go directly to certain projects. Everyone seemed to underestimate the enormity of spending \$800B.

NYS Governor David Paterson formed an Economic Recovery and Reinvestment Cabinet, which also includes a number of sub-cabinets, to review the “wish list” of communities across the State and file the projects and programs under the respective categories. Up to this point, communities were feverishly speaking to their U.S. congressional representatives, State senators and assemblymen, and district offices on where they might “sign up”. Communities could also list their projects on the web at ny.recovery.gov. Newspapers were heralding that communities had asked for millions of dollars in stimulus money which some perceived as an award. Some congressional websites indicated that specific projects were on their individual lists for funding priority. There were one thousand fold more requests than money available.

At the same time, the federal government was determining the requirements for new funding programs, while some of the money was being allocated

to existing programs. Some of these new regulations have been worked out and some are still pending. In NYS, most of the discretionary funding, which was comparatively limited, went to education and Medicaid. This eliminated the need for taxes on such things as haircuts and amusement parks. \$400M has been allocated to transportation projects and these have been certified by the Governor. Stimulus money has also been awarded to the food stamp program, and tax credits are available for purchasing automobiles and for first time homebuyers.

The important message to take away from this article is that communities cannot rely on the fact that they have projects that have been filed with the State or appear on some list generated by political representatives. Also, your project may or may not be eligible for funding based on the established criteria. You have to remain diligent regarding announcements related to funding opportunities and apply by the deadline. For example, we expect that the Firefighters Fire Station Construction grant will be due by July 10. Also, funding has been allocated for energy conservation and efficiencies for municipal buildings. A Notice of Funding Availability has not been published yet.

Thoma will continue to research new developments related to stimulus funds and advise our customers.

GET READY FOR CDBGs

We often advise our customers to plan ahead for funding opportunities. Some grant programs require more project development, and thus more lead time, before a competitive application can be submitted. Oftentimes, by the time a Notice of Funding Availability is issued, it's too late to start the development process. One of the more popular funding sources is the Small Cities Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG). If a community is contemplating a 2010 CDBG application, now is the time to start the process.

Eligible communities can apply for up to \$400,000 in the areas of housing and public facilities, and \$600,000 for public infrastructure. Sev-

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MOUNT MORRIS SECURES NYMS FUNDS

The Village of Mt. Morris in Livingston County was one of only 8 municipalities State-wide awarded New York Main Street (NYMS) funds from the Office of Community Renewal during the Fall 2008 funding round. With Thoma's assistance, the Village secured \$400,000 which will be used for façade improvements; building renovations for both commercial and residential space; and upgrades to a downtown pocket park. The target area focused upon in the Mt. Morris application includes the three streets and 52 buildings that comprise the downtown. The Village will work in tandem with the Livingston County Local Development Corporation (LDC) and their subsidiary, the Alliance for Business Growth, to assist with program administration.

Prior to the NYMS submission, the Village had completed a Downtown Strategic Plan to guide their revitalization efforts. Positioning Mount Morris as an arts and cultural center of western New York was a primary goal of the plan.

The NYMS grant will support the creation of artist and artisan live/work spaces and related commercial development, significantly furthering this goal. In total, the program will help to renovate 13 residential units, 9 commercial units, and 6 building facades. This will make Mt. Morris a more vibrant place to live and work, and hopefully will be a catalyst for new investment.

New York Main Street funding has typically been restricted to non-profit applicants. The Fall 2008 funding round was the only time that municipalities could apply directly. There are currently efforts underway to make permanent changes to the program that would allow municipalities to once again be eligible to apply for future funding. We will monitor developments and changes to the program and keep our customers apprised. In the meantime, municipalities interested in pursuing development funding for their downtown areas should contact us to discuss available options.

STAYING COOL AT THE BREWSTER HOUSE

The Elizabeth Brewster House, Inc., a licensed adult home located in the picturesque historic Village of Homer, is home to 45 older residents. Thoma has been working with Elizabeth Brewster House on its grant needs for several years. Recently the House was awarded \$75,000 in Enhancing Abilities and Life Experience (ENABLE) funds to update its aging air conditioning system. Other recent grant successes include an \$85,000 ENABLE award to modify a portion of the house as a physical therapy room and buy needed exercise equipment. Another grant is pending which would provide computer work stations, internet access, and funds for a large gardening and landscaping project. The ENABLE Program is administered by the New York State Department of Health. One of the goals of the program is to improve the physical health and mental well being of those living in adult homes. Elizabeth Brewster House, established in 1891, provides wonderful facilities for its residents and has actively pursued funding streams to keep its costs affordable.

“It has been a thorough pleasure working with Thoma on our exciting grant opportunities and needs. These grants have totaled over \$1.6M and have allowed us to undertake projects that would have been financially out of our reach or would have forced us to incur significant debt, especially in light of being a not-for-profit facility for older adults living on a fixed income. We would recommend Thoma to any agency. They provide a professional and exceptionally friendly service and deliver the utmost quality results.” Thomas Obuck, Executive Director, Elizabeth Brewster House, Inc.



THOMA WELCOMES NEW CUSTOMERS

We welcome two new customers, the Town of Catlin in Chemung County and the Town of New Haven in Oswego County. The Town of Catlin enlisted our services to submit a 2009 Community Development Block Grant and the Town of New Haven is a new Grant Writing Service customer.

We are happy to be working with Supervisors William Collier in Catlin and Frederick Wilbur in New Haven. We look forward to a long and fruitful working relationship.