

Chapter 7: Community Development Needs

The following section of the needs assessment describes the City's CDBG-eligible non-housing community development needs. Community development activities include public services, infrastructure, neighborhood services, community facilities and economic development activities. CDBG funds may be used to fund certain community development activities. The goal of the CDBG Program in addressing housing needs in addition to non-housing needs is to improve livability and help create better functioning and more attractive communities by integrating and coordinating economic, physical, environmental, community, and human development programs. By providing access to services and projects to address non-housing needs, a community can provide opportunities for self-sufficiency and empower those most in need.

Profile of Community Facilities and Services:

Streets, Sidewalks and Infrastructure:

The City of Jonesboro has adopted a Five-Year Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for 2007 through 2011, which is the City's plan to add, maintain and improve City facilities and infrastructure. The CIP was approved by the City Council on October 24, 2006. Due to a backlog of drainage, landfill, and other major projects, a number of planned projects may have to be deferred because of capital funding constraints. The CIP identifies a number of criteria for selecting capital projects, as summarized below:

- Health and safety requirements or legal mandates
- Preservation of existing assets
- City priorities and/or neighborhood interest
- Economic development/revitalization goals
- Reduction in operation and maintenance costs

The City of Jonesboro places a high priority on preventive maintenance to preserve the City's investment in existing infrastructure and on replacing infrastructure that has outlived its useful life. The CIP identifies a number of ongoing annual projects for the maintenance and improvement of streets, sidewalks, school safety, drainage, storm water, parks, land use, facilities, and landfill closure and post closure systems. Currently the City has identified eleven specific drainage projects which are under engineering design and are scheduled to be completed within the first three years of the five year CIP.

Included in the CIP is the consideration that a number of sidewalks and streets throughout the City may not be fully compliant with the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Standards for accessibility and/or may need repair or replacement. The City will annually review sidewalk improvements in its CIP. The City continues to retrofit as many curbs as possible so that all intersections in the City are eventually disability accessible, pedestrian friendly and conform to ADA requirements. Making streets and sidewalks pedestrian friendly and disability accessible per ADA standards is therefore another need in the community. The CIP also identifies a need to carry out renovations to make all City facilities fully accessible and in compliance with ADA standards.

Parks:

The City of Jonesboro Long Range Plan (adopted by the City Council), provides a comprehensive review of the needs in the City of Jonesboro and provides a long-term vision to guide decisions related to park and greenway resources. There are over 900 acres of parks and 29 potential miles of greenway land in Jonesboro, divided among 1 regional park, 5 community parks (three with community centers), 4 neighborhood parks, and 8 mini parks. Jonesboro's parks provide the areas needed for athletic activities such as baseball, basketball, tennis, softball, football and soccer.

In February of 2004, the City Council Public Services Committee approved the Parks and Recreation Long Range Plan. One of the major projects in the Long Range Plan is to complete a 29 mile greenway trail encircling the city of Jonesboro and connecting points of interest.

The City's Park Long Range Plan notes that while the City has an outstanding park and recreation system, its park and open space needs are changing and will continue to do so, in response to changing circumstances such as demographics, density trends, economic cycles, levels of environmental awareness. A recent study of the levels of service provided by the Parks Department pointed out that due to continued high-density development, the City needs more space for parks.

Although the Plan identifies some areas as being more in need than others, the Plan concludes that all the planning areas could benefit from additional parks and Greenway resources. The Plan is developed to be intentionally flexible so that actions can be implemented as opportunities arise. As part of the intent to be "intentionally flexible," the Plan notes that recommendations might be implemented out of priority order dependent on current opportunities and circumstances.

Improving access to park and open space resources is another goal of the Long Range Plan. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that persons with disabilities not be discriminated against in regard to access to public facilities. The Parks Long Range Plan identifies improvements needed to bring playground equipment in compliance with ADA requirements. The ADA Playground Improvements Program to correct playground safety and accessibility issues is currently underway. The City has made substantial progress and has upgraded 11 of 18 playgrounds to meet current ADA and safety standards. However, there are still seven park playgrounds in need of ADA improvements. The construction of new restrooms is also currently under consideration. All new construction conforms to ADA standards.

In conclusion, parks and the Greenway project are an important aspect of livable neighborhoods. Especially in lower income areas of the City, which typically have higher density housing and limited open space for recreation, the inclusion of neighborhood parks that residents can easily walk to are important in creating quality living environments. The City of Jonesboro's Long Range Plan outlines a number of goals and recommendations that are incorporated into the City's Consolidated Plan. These include preserving, maintaining and acquiring parks and open space, increasing and improving access to existing and planned parks and greenways, and distributing recreational opportunities evenly throughout the City. The Plan also recommends utilizing of any opportunities as they arise to increase parkland throughout the City.

Public Services:

Lower income residents in the City of Jonesboro, especially those earning 50 percent or less of the City median income, rely on a number of public services in order to meet basic needs. Seniors in particular rely on public services not only to meet basic needs and manage expenses on their limited fixed incomes, but also to continue living in their homes and prevent being institutionalized. Persons on the verge of homelessness and homeless

persons also rely heavily on numerous public services either to prevent them from becoming homeless or to transition out of homelessness. Jonesboro is a diverse community, therefore, it is important that services are accessible and non-English speaking persons are accommodated. Some of the basic public services that are needed not only include the services for basic needs but also:

- Supportive services for low income persons transitioning from supportive housing to homeownership;
- Youth services, including educational and recreational activities, programs, and services
- Supportive, educational, and recreational services for persons with disabilities, the frail elderly, and other special needs populations;
- Health services, including preventive health services for low income persons;
- Supportive services for persons at risk of homelessness;
- Supportive assistance to non-profit agencies serving low income persons to ensure their viability.

The City of Jonesboro is currently allocating the maximum public service budget allowed under the CDBG Program and has supplemented this funding with General Fund support for public services. The City relies heavily on the CDBG Program to meet the public service needs in the community. However, the City's CDBG entitlement continues to decline each year, and this decline directly affects the amount of funding that may be allocated for public services. This situation has made it difficult for the City to meet all the public service needs in the community.

In addition to the public services described above, outreach is needed (also in languages other than English) to inform the community about available services and programs. New avenues need to be explored for carrying out outreach, such as post offices, direct mail, churches, and schools. Outreach to seniors is especially important due to the isolated lives some of them lead.

Transportation:

The Jonesboro Economical Transportation System (JETS) provides public transportation services in the City of Jonesboro. These services include fixed route transit and demand response services. JETS operates four fixed routes and provides demand response service for seniors and people with disabilities. JETS has five buses and one van. In March alone, JETS ran 3,143 fixed route trips and 438 demand response trips.

Traditionally, JETS service has been oriented to serve the citizens of Jonesboro with occupational, educational, or recreational transportation. Decentralized industrial areas and suburban employment centers create an increasing need for cross-town travel. JETS is aware of these needs and continues to explore new services through which to coordinate with other transportation providers to address this issue.

The Jonesboro MPO Urbanized Area Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan (CP-HSTP) is a vision of how transit providers, social service agencies and key stakeholders will transport low-income individuals, elderly, and disabled persons. The plan focuses on all their travel needs: work, shopping, medical, social and other in Jonesboro metropolitan area. Access to jobs and reverse commute can be challenging for the families on the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, low-income individuals, and persons with disabilities.

Studies in some metropolitan areas with extensive transit systems have shown that less than half of the jobs are accessible by transit. Even fewer jobs are accessible by transit in areas with limited transit systems. Many entry-level workers have difficulty reaching jobs during evening or weekend shifts when transit services are frequently

diminished or non-existent. Work trips can also be complex, involving multiple destinations, including childcare providers. Low income individuals, elderly, and disabled persons face similar difficulties for non-work trips on weekends, holidays, and during the times when the transit system is not operating. Auto ownership among TANF recipients and other low-income persons is low. Most TANF recipients do not own cars and nearly 40 percent of workers with annual incomes below \$10,000 do not commute by car.

JETS is coordinating with other agencies in providing accessibility jobs, especially among economically disadvantaged residents in the urbanized area. The focus of this coordination is to improve access for eligible low-income individuals to industries and geographic areas that provide entry-level job opportunities. The plan also focuses on improving access to job-related support services such as education, vocational and skills training, and childcare.

Economic Development Activities:

Economic development is a City-wide priority and focuses on retaining and attracting businesses to maintain, strengthen and diversify the businesses in the community, and support the long-term financial health of the City. Jonesboro's economic fiscal health is tied to the vitality of its business community. As with most cities in Arkansas, the City of Jonesboro's overall revenue is directly affected by its sales tax revenue.

The overall HUD goal for economic development is "to expand economic opportunities," especially for the extremely low, very low and low-income. The City's CDBG Program's overall goal is to create new jobs and business opportunities for low and moderate-income persons in the special impact areas (as reflected by census data.) This goal requires a definitive plan which is currently under consideration and is scheduled to be specifically defined in the 2008/2009 program years. The strategies will include: stimulate revitalization of older neighborhood commercial areas, provide economic opportunities for new and expanding neighborhood-serving businesses, including minority and women-owned businesses, enhance the quality and level of goods and services available in Jonesboro's low income neighborhoods, reduce crime and improve the safety of neighborhoods, and public improvements to beautify blighted areas.