

Public Comments Resilient SRQ Draft Action Plan

Sarasota County public comment period on the draft action plan for the Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR), or “Resilient SRQ” took place from July 26, 2023, through August 25, 2023. A total of 992 comments were received during this time.

Comments could be submitted using the following formats:

- Using an online form at the webpage, www.scgov.net/ResilientSRQ
- Emailing ResilientSRQComments@scgov.net
- Attending the public hearing and providing comments either in writing or orally
- Mailing a letter to the Resilient SRQ team

The below table provides a summary of the comments received and the County’s response. Section A. provides comments received on specific projects, while Section B. provides general comments received about the draft Action Plan.

Section A. Comments Received on Specific Projects and Programs

Topic	# of Comments Received	Summary of Comments Received	County Response
Midnight Pass	599	<p>Comments received about Midnight Pass asked the County to invest the required funds to begin the permitting and planning process to restore “Midnight Pass,” a historical tidal connection between the Gulf of Mexico and Little Sarasota Bay. Midnight Pass was closed in the 1980’s.</p> <p>Comments claimed this project would restore the water quality in the area and assist with Sarasota County’s primary economic driver, clean water and beaches.</p>	<p>According to the federal register notice, broad eligibility requirements extend to all CDBG-DR projects which includes but is not limited to having to meet a HUD national objective (elimination of slum or blight; having an urgent need; or benefiting low to moderate income persons) as well as having a direct or indirect tie-in to Hurricane Ian - of note, this latter tie-in requirement is waived in the use of the 15% statutory set aside of mitigation funds. Based on only these few factors, the proposed project may have the potential to only qualify under CDBG-DR as an urgent need as a result of a direct or indirect impact from Hurricane Ian or possibly under the mitigation set aside.</p> <p>However, in consideration of other factors, all CDBG-DR projects must also qualify as an eligible activity in accordance with Title I of the Housing and Community Development Act (HCDA) of 1974, which is the original authorizing legislation for the CDBG program, and any of its applicable waivers and alternative requirements. One of the core purposes and legislative intent of the HCDA and the resulting creation of the CDBG program is to eliminate blight; to conserve and renew urban areas; to improve the living environment of low-to-moderate income families; and develop new centers of population group and economic activity. Specifically, HCDA</p>

			<p>eligible activities include those primarily related to advancement of quality housing especially for vulnerable populations and low to moderate income persons, improvements to infrastructure, and economic revitalization programs to create pathways to upward economic mobility for underserved communities.</p> <p>As a function of CDBG-DR, these same HCDA activities, to include any associated planning activities, are to be deployed by grantees in the context of disaster recovery to address the continuing unmet needs as a result of a major disaster. In the case of the proposed project and the re-opening of a channel, which has a historical and documented core purpose to reverse a man-made issue in the pursuit of potential environmental benefits, this activity is not contemplated as one of the intended purposes and eligible uses of the HCDA, nor any of its applicable waivers and alternative requires afforded under CDBG-DR. For example, the proposed project does not rehabilitate or reconstruct impacted homes or develop new affordable housing; it does not repair critically needed infrastructure and other public facilities; and it does not fund job growth programs and other economic revitalization programs due to job losses and business impacts from a disaster.</p> <p>While staff recognize this is an important project of the community, to recommend this project for inclusion in the action plan with its eligibility concerns may have the unintended consequence of coming under intense scrutiny by HUD to include evaluation of its ability to be in compliance with the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) and associated federal environment laws. This proposed project's inclusion may then delay the approval of the action plan in the critical stage of its initial approval by HUD, thereby delaying all projects and programs proposed. Therefore, staff are not recommending this project be included in the action plan and instead recommends an alternative, non-HUD related funding source be identified and pursued.</p>
Heritage Oaks Lift Station	77	<p>Comments received about the lift stations located near the Heritage Oaks community asked Sarasota County to install emergency back-up diesel generators at the 3 wastewater lift stations in Heritage Oaks. These lift stations move sewage from not only Heritage Oaks but other nearby communities towards the wastewater treatment plant. They do not currently have back-up generators in case of</p>	<p>The Heritage Oaks Lift Station was carefully considered by staff. Due to the nature of the project, it would not be eligible to meet the remediation of slums and blight National Objectives. However, the project may be eligible for consideration if the lift station serves a low-to-moderate area (LMA). The exact service area will have to be determined during application intake after the launch of the Infrastructure and Public Facilities program. In addition, the nature of the project may meet the Urgent Need National Objective as defined in the Federal Register Notice if it poses an immediate threat to the health and welfare of the community. More information on the project specifics would be needed before staff could make a formal recommendation.</p>

		power failure. After Hurricane Ian, power was not quickly restored to at least one of these lift stations before the neighboring area, resulting in a sewage that damaged individual homes within Heritage Oaks.	Infrastructure and public facility projects to be considered by the County can be submitted via application process once the Infrastructure and Public Facilities program launches after HUD’s formal approval of this Action Plan and development of programmatic Policies and Procedures. This project may be considered for an application for funding at program launch and its eligibility and service area would be formally vetted by staff at this stage. The County anticipates potentially launching the program sometime in 2024 at which time applications will need to be submitted by the responsible public entity.
Matheny Creek and Elligraw Bayou	76	<p>Comments received about Matheny Creek and Elligraw Bayou expressed their support for Phase 1 of the Matheny Creek and Elligraw Bayou Stormwater Management System and Water Quality Resilience Project, which includes acquisition and conversion of the abandoned golf course in the Gulf Gate development to a stormwater management/water quality/passive recreation project.</p> <p>Comments received claimed the project would provide flood protection for an area of 1,900 acres representing 7,600 living units and would promote a more resilient community and filter stormwater before it flows into Little Sarasota Bay.</p>	<p>The Matheny Creek and Elligraw Bayou project was carefully reviewed by County Staff. The County’s concerns after considering the project include:</p> <p>National Objective – Though the project lacks a direct tie-back, the project could possibly be undertaken as a mitigation project, depending on its final design and subject to ensuring the project would meet a HUD National Objective. Based on a preliminary review, it does not appear that the project meets two of the three HUD National Objectives, an Urgent Need or prevention of slum or blight. Therefore, this project would likely only be eligible if meeting the third HUD National Objective, a low-to-moderate income (LMI) benefit. Based on preliminary analysis of LMI data, the Gulf Gate community, containing the previous Gulf Gate Golf Course, is not located in a LMI qualified block group. Gulf Gate Estates is located in Census Tract 2004, Block Group 2 where 44.4% of the population is identified as LMI. This LMI population percentage is below the exception grantee percent of 48.33%, thereby potentially making it ineligible to meet the Low- Moderate Area benefit. The exact service area will have to be determined during application intake after the launch of the Infrastructure and Public Facilities program.</p> <p>This project may be considered for an application for funding at program launch and its eligibility and service area would be formally vetted by staff at this stage. The County anticipates potentially launching the program sometime in 2024 at which time applications will need to be submitted by eligible public or non-profit entities.</p>
Gottfried Creek	75	Comments received about Gottfried Creek noted the neighborhood’s ongoing concern with Gottfried Creek, including the 64 homes in the Foxwood Condominium Community that were flooded from Hurricane Ian from Gottfried Creek. Requests were made to inspect the broken and felled trees	<p>Gottfried Creek and the establishment of a grant program for homeowners was carefully considered. The County’s concerns for use of CDBG-DR funds after considering the project include:</p> <p>Meeting a HUD National Objective - While the project appears to have tie-back to the storm event, and in some cases debris removal can be a qualified activity, the primary issue is the concern that the project does not appear to meet at least two of the HUD National Objectives. The project inherently doesn’t involve the remediation of slums and blight. The project does not meet the second HUD</p>

		<p>on part of the privately owned property of Gottfried Creek to reduce blockage for future heavy rainfall.</p> <p>These comments requested the action plan include an allocation of grant money for Condominium Associations and Homeowner Associations to clear Gottfried Creek to improve storm-water drainage.</p>	<p>national objective, a low-to-moderate (LMI) benefit. Based on preliminary review of Gottfried Creek and its orientation and locale within the Foxwood Condominiums residential complex it appears that the project would not qualify. Due to the specificity of the beneficiaries, the County would have to obtain individual household income data for those persons benefiting from project, those in proximity to the creek or those who may be impacted by creek flooding. Analysis of HUD and Census data for this area, as well as the County’s familiarity with the location, leads the County to believe that the residents of this area would not qualify as predominantly LMI qualified. Based on preliminary analysis of LMI data, Foxwood Condominiums is also not located in a LMI qualified block group. Foxwood Condominiums are located in Census Tract 2604, Block Group 1 where 28.5% of the population is identified as LMI. This LMI population percentage is below the exception grantee percent of 48.33%, thereby making it ineligible to meet the Low- Moderate Area benefit.</p> <p>The nature of the project may meet the Urgent Need National Objective as defined in the Federal Register Notice if it poses an immediate threat to the health and welfare of the community. More information on the project specifics would be needed before staff could make a formal recommendation.</p> <p>This project may be considered for an application for funding at program launch and its eligibility and service area would be formally vetted by staff at this stage. The County anticipates potentially launching the program sometime in 2024 at which time applications will need to be submitted by eligible public or non-profit entities.</p>
Housing	23	<p>Comments in support of housing rehabilitation, reconstruction, and mobile home replacement asked that the county dedicate funding to assisting residents repair or replace their homes so that they can safely return to their property.</p>	<p>Comments received helped further justify the substantial need for housing rehabilitation, reconstruction, and replacement and indicated public support for such projects.</p> <p>Requests for assistance can be submitted via application process once the housing programs launch after HUD’s formal approval of this Action Plan and development of programmatic Policies and Procedures. The County anticipates potentially launching the program sometime in 2024 at which time applications will need to be submitted by eligible homeowners. The public will be made aware of the launch of this program through the County’s website.</p>
Dredging Forked Creek	18	<p>Comments received about Forked Creek requested assistance from Sarasota County to dredge the creek due to erosion that occurred during the hurricane resulting in the creek being</p>	<p>The County’s concerns for use of CDBG-DR funds after considering the Forked Creek project include:</p> <p>Lack of tie-back – There is concern that the project does not appear to have a direct tie-back to the storm event. Those seeking approval for the project would need to</p>

		<p>filled with silt making it no longer navigable during all tides.</p>	<p>provide evidence that the excessive sedimentation issue was related to impacts from the storm event and not an issue of deferred maintenance. Maintenance is not an eligible activity under CDBG-DR funding. More information about the creek before and after Hurricane Ian would be needed to determine a direct or indirect tie back.</p> <p>Meeting a HUD National Objective – As with all CDBG-DR projects, a project would need to meet one of the three HUD National Objectives. The project doesn't inherently involve the remediation of slums and blight. This project does not meet the second HUD national objective, a low-to-moderate (LMI) benefit. Based on preliminary review of the location of Forked Creek, as well as the waterways and tributaries extending from it, it appears that the project would not qualify. The creek originates in undeveloped areas and extends through several block groups eventually emptying into Lemon Bay. Based on a preliminary staff review of HUD data, none of the block groups encompassing any of the creek or its associated waterways, are LMI qualified. These block groups include the following: Census Tract 2601, Block Group 1, Census Tract 2601, Block Group 2, Census Tract 2602, Block Group 1, Census Tract 2602, Block Group 2, Census, Tract 2603, Block Group 1, and Census Tract 2718, Block Group 2.</p> <p>The percent LMI population for this service is 30.9% which is below the exception grantee percent of 48.33%, thereby making it ineligible to meet the Low- Moderate Area benefit.</p> <p>The nature of the project may meet the Urgent Need National Objective as defined in the Federal Register Notice if it poses an immediate threat to the health and welfare of the community. More information on the project specifics would be needed before staff could make a formal recommendation.</p> <p>This project may be considered for an application for funding at program launch and its eligibility and service area would be formally vetted by staff at this stage. The County anticipates potentially launching the program sometime in 2024 at which time applications will need to be submitted by eligible public or non-profit entities.</p>
<p>Support for Nonprofit Organizations Receiving CDBG-DR Funds</p>	<p>16</p>	<p>Comments received in this category supported the requests for specific nonprofits, including the Hermitage Artist Retreat, the Venice Theater, Kiwanis Club of North Port, the Sarasota County Agricultural Fair Association, North Port Coalition for</p>	<p>Comments received helped further justify the substantial need for nonprofit projects under the public facilities and infrastructure program.</p> <p>Some comments provided suggestions for additional projects for consideration. Infrastructure and public facility projects to be considered by the County can be submitted via application process once the Infrastructure and Public Facilities program launches after HUD's formal approval of this Action Plan and development of programmatic Policies and Procedures. The County anticipates potentially</p>

		<p>the Homeless/Needy Children, Inc, The Salvation Army Sarasota County, Boys & Girls Clubs of Sarasota and DeSoto Counties, Education Foundation of Sarasota County, Family Promise of South Sarasota County, several home owner associations, along with comments in support of a new structure or facility to better organize the nonprofit organizations in North Port.</p>	<p>launching the program sometime in 2024 at which time applications will need to be submitted by eligible public or non-profit entities. The public will be made aware of the launch of this program through the County’s website.</p> <p>All projects must meet a HUD National Objective: serve an urgent need, aid in the elimination of slum or blight, or benefit low to moderate income persons. Projects must also have a direct or indirect tie back to Hurricane Ian.</p>
Fox Lea Farm	14	<p>Comments received requested a hurricane barn in Sarasota County for horses and other large livestock as the nearest major hurricane barn is in Ocala, Florida and not accessible for many in Sarasota County. Comments requested a hurricane barn to be built at Fox Lea Farm for future disasters.</p>	<p>The County carefully considered this project request and have the following concerns:</p> <p>Meeting a HUD National Objective – As with all CDBG-DR projects, the project would need to meet one of the three HUD National Objectives: urgent need, elimination of slum or blight, or benefit low to moderate income persons. It would not qualify as Urgent Need since it is already on record as being a long-standing issue pre-Hurricane Ian and it does not pose a serious and immediate threat to the health or welfare of the community. While the threat to animals may be serious and immediate, HUD would not consider this an immediate threat to the community. The project also inherently doesn’t involve the remediation of slums and blight. In order to meet the third objective, a low-to-moderate income (LMI) benefit, the hurricane barn would need to serve a vulnerable population. HUD considers the following to be vulnerable populations: the working poor, minorities, Native Americans, people with disabilities, people with AIDS, the elderly, and the homeless.</p> <p>With these considerations of a hurricane barn, staff would not recommend inclusion of this project in the Action Plan.</p>
Support for Businesses (for profit)	11	<p>Comments received in support of funding for businesses requested that a portion of these funds go to restoring losses, including loss of business operations, incurred because of Hurricane Ian.</p>	<p>The County has reviewed and considered the comments related to assisting businesses. Any business assistance program would need to have tie-back to the event as indicated in the HUD CDBG-DR Policy Guide, <i>“All economic revitalization activities must address economic impact(s) caused by the disaster”</i>. This could possibly include assistance with repairs to damaged businesses, buy-out of damaged properties, business development assistance in the wake of business/job loss, or similar recovery activities.</p> <p>If a tie-back to Hurricane Ian could be established, these programs would still have to meet a HUD National Objective. Economic development and economic</p>

			<p>revitalization activities typically can only meet the Benefit to Low to Moderate Income (LMI) Persons or Urgent Need National Objective (with Urgent Need only being permitted in special situations). To qualify as an Urgent Need, businesses would need to demonstrate there is a serious and immediate threat to the health or welfare of the community.</p> <p>In order to meet the LMI National Objective, the activities undertaken must result in the creation or retention of permanent jobs where at least 51% of these jobs are made available to LMI persons. This can require substantial documentation and cooperation from local businesses to ensure eligibility and compliance. The other LMI National Objective option would be an “area benefit” (LMA) where assistance is provided to a business that provides goods or services to residents of an LMI qualified residential area. In this case the service area must be defined, confirmed as LMA qualified, and the area must be predominantly residential.</p> <p>There are a variety of concerns the County had when considering potential economic recovery projects which include anticipated low interest based on HUD requirements, applicant eligibility, ongoing compliance requirements, slow expenditure of funds, and service area determination for individual businesses, among others.</p> <p>While none of these issues strictly exclude other economic revitalization projects, they were taken into consideration when projects and programs were being developed and would need to be accounted for in any potential economic recovery projects or programs considered in the future.</p>
<p>Career Training/Economic Recovery</p>	<p>8</p>	<p>Comments received encouraged the County to greatly reduce or eliminate Career training/economic recovery funds from the plan to increase funding for infrastructure and affordable housing projects. Respondents felt that there are already high-quality training programs in the county and the labor shortage is largely due to a lack of affordable housing.</p> <p>Several comments named other industries besides construction fields that would benefit from a career</p>	<p>The County has reviewed and considered these comments, however, the economic recovery program not only addresses the issues surrounding the skilled worker shortage suffered in the wake of the disaster but also helps provide a longer term, more holistic approach, by providing residents with increased and enhanced work skills to potentially secure higher paying jobs. Increased household income has a direct impact on an individual or household’s ability to comfortably afford housing. Because of these multiple benefits the County will continue to consider the economic recovery Career Training program.</p>

		training program including healthcare and trucking.	
Infrastructure Projects	8	Comments received asked the County to consider specific infrastructure projects and to increase the resiliency of our roads, bridges, stormwater and wastewater management, and the electrical power grid.	<p>Comments received helped further justify the substantial need for these projects and indicated public support for such projects. No further actions were taken.</p> <p>Several comments provided suggestions for additional projects for consideration. Infrastructure and public facility projects to be considered by the County can be submitted via application process once the Infrastructure and Public Facilities program launches after HUD’s formal approval of this Action Plan and development of programmatic Policies and Procedures. The County anticipates potentially launching the program sometime in 2024 at which time applications will need to be submitted by eligible public or non-profit entities. The public will be made aware of the launch of this program through the County’s website.</p> <p>All projects must meet a HUD National Objective: serve an urgent need, aid in the elimination of slum or blight, or benefit low to moderate income persons. All projects must also have a direct or indirect tie back to Hurricane Ian, unless using the mitigation set aside.</p>
Affordable Housing	8	Comments were both in support of new affordable housing and in opposition to new affordable housing were received with the vast majority asking the county to utilize as much funding as possible to create additional affordable and work force housing. Comments include the considerable unmet housing needs, and that new affordable housing would help the business community to attract and retain a trained workforce.	<p>Comments received helped further justify the substantial need for affordable housing and indicated public support for such projects. Creation of new affordable housing is an eligible activity under CDBG-DR and meets the HUD National Objective of benefit low to moderate income people.</p> <p>Affordable housing projects to be considered by the County can be submitted via application process once the housing programs launch after HUD’s formal approval of this Action Plan and development of programmatic Policies and Procedures. The County anticipates potentially launching the program sometime in 2024 at which time applications will need to be submitted by eligible entities. The public will be made aware of the launch of this program through the County’s website.</p>

Section B: General comments received on Action Plan

Topic	# of Comments Received	Summary of Comments Received	County Response
Insurance/ Deductibles	15	Comments received discussed issues with insurance companies filing for	Comments received help further justify the need for a rehabilitation and reimbursement program and indicated public support for such projects.

		bankruptcy or not paying enough to cover the cost to repair the damages from Hurricane Ian.	Requests for assistance can be submitted via application process once the housing programs launch after HUD’s formal approval of this Action Plan and development of programmatic Policies and Procedures. The County anticipates potentially launching the program sometime in 2024 at which time applications will need to be submitted by eligible homeowners. The public will be made aware of the launch of this program through the County’s website.
Funds needed for South Sarasota County (Englewood, North Port, Venice)	10	Comments received about Funds Needed for South County including North Port and Englewood encouraged Sarasota County to invest significant funding in the southern part of the county where much of the damage from Hurricane Ian occurred.	<p>Comments received further justified the substantial need for housing and infrastructure/public facilities programs in areas of Sarasota County most impacted by Hurricane Ian. All projects must have a direct or indirect tie back to Hurricane Ian and must meet a HUD National Objective: urgent need, remediation of slum or blight, or benefit low to moderate income persons.</p> <p>Projects would not need to have a tie back to Hurricane Ian if mitigation funding is being used for the project.</p> <p>Housing rehabilitation/reconstruction and Infrastructure/public facilities projects to be considered by the County can be submitted via an application process once programs launch after HUD’s formal approval of this Action Plan and development of programmatic Policies and Procedures. The County anticipates launching the programs sometime in 2024 at which time applications can be submitted. The public will be made aware of the launch of these programs through the County’s website.</p>
Environmental Concerns	8	Comments received asking the County to consider taking additional steps to combat climate change and protect the environment.	<p>Comments received regarding environmental concerns were previously addressed in the draft Action Plan in section 3.5.1. Green Building Standards. All CDBG-DR-funded projects must identify an industry-recognized green building standard and a minimum energy efficiency standard. HUD requires all rehabilitation, reconstruction, and new construction to be designed to incorporate principles of sustainability, including water and energy efficiency, resilience, and to mitigate the impact of future disasters. Qualifying standards include any of the green building and green development standards under the following programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Florida Green Building Coalition • U.S. Green Building Council Leadership in Emergency and Environmental Design (LEED) • National Green Building Standard • Green Gloves • Living Building Challenge <p>Per Sec. 124-122 - Landscaping and Buffering of the Sarasota County Unified Development Code, properly landscaped and maintained areas can reduce the</p>

			<p>potential incompatibility of adjacent land uses, conserve natural resources and maintain open space, protect established residential neighborhoods, and promote and enhance community image and roadway beautification. Additional Environmental and Natural Resource preservation can be found in Chapter 54 of the Code of Ordinances, including air quality, water quality, environmentally sensitive land, etc.</p> <p>One comment indicated the County has an additional levee that was not indicated in section 2.7.3.1.3 Levee Failure. This clarification was added to the Action Plan.</p>
General Concerns	8	<p>Comments included general concerns on the draft action plan and a concern about the location of the public hearing.</p>	<p>The County reviewed and considered the general concerns and did not make any changes to the Action Plan.</p> <p>For the location of the hearing, staff chose a location for the public hearing that could be accessible via bus routes with a focus on areas that experienced significant damage from Hurricane Ian. The event was also held in the evening to maximize attendance.</p> <p>For those who could not attend the event in person, a livestream of the event was arranged, which aired on television and YouTube. The recording is available on the Resilient SRQ webpage. Sarasota County residents also had multiple ways to provide public comments on the draft action plan including using an online form on the webpage, emailing ResilientSRQComments@scgov.net, or mailing a letter.</p>
Request to be added to contact list	5	<p>Several comments asked the County to add their contact information to be notified when applications open and additional information is available.</p>	<p>These individuals will be added to the Resilient SRQ distribution list.</p>
Compliments to Staff and Offer of Assistance	5	<p>Comments included accolades for the draft action plan and were complimentary of Staff for how they ran the Public Hearing on August 9, 2023.</p> <p>A local radio station offered assistance spreading the word about Resilient SRQ.</p>	<p>The Resilient SRQ communications team contacted the radio station for potential future partnerships.</p>
No New Development Projects	4	<p>Comments received regarding new development expressed concern regarding building practices and indicated a desire for funds to be</p>	<p>The County received and reviewed comments recommending that funds be used on infrastructure rather than housing. Based upon data analysis, there is a strong need for both housing and infrastructure/public facilities programs, especially in</p>

		focused on infrastructure and land preservation rather than housing.	<p>areas that were most impacted from Hurricane Ian.</p> <p>The County will consider infrastructure and housing projects that best meet the unmet needs of Sarasota County following Hurricane Ian.</p>
Urgent Housing Assistance Needed	4	Comments received by community members who needed immediate housing assistance for their damaged properties.	Comments received helped further justify the substantial need for these projects and indicated that residents seem willing to participate in these programs. Additional resources were provided to those who expressed urgent need. No further actions were taken.