

Wed, Apr 15, 2015

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Portland's community development grants reduced, demand remains high



[David Harry](#)

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PORTLAND — A plan to help people left most vulnerable by expected changes to city general assistance, homeless and public health programs will rely largely on \$4.28 million in city funds and federal Community Development Block Grants.

Funding from the Consolidated Housing and Community Development Annual Action Plan will be the subject of an April 22 public hearing by the City Council Housing and Community Development Committee.

"My (CDBG) recommendations focused on mental health services, child-care services, food assistance, and emergency housing," acting City Manager Sheila Hill-Christian said in her April 6 budget letter.

The funds comprising the action plan include a federal CDBG grant of \$1.8 million (with \$400,00 for job training services), \$265,000 in CDBG Housing funds, \$820,000 from the federal Home Investments Partnerships Program, an Emergency Solutions Grant of \$162,000, use of \$643,000 from the city Housing Trust Fund, and income from other existing programs of \$605,000.

Toho Soma, the city's acting public health director, said in an April 9 email the effects could be widespread from aid reductions in several areas of the state biennial budget presented by Gov. Paul LePage.

"The public health cuts would result in severe reductions to the Children's Oral Health Program, which provides restorative and preventive dental care, and oral health education, to any Portland Public School student in need. Other reductions affect the capacity of the India Street Clinic, the Chronic Disease Prevention Program, the Health Equity and Research Program, and general operations," he said.

Grant funding amounting to \$525,000 will be spread through food programs at Preble Street and Wayside, for mental health and substance abuse peer support and counseling at Amistad, and to fund the Homeless Outreach and Mobile Engagement, or HOME team providing assistance and referrals for the city's homeless.

HOME team support had been shifted from the grant program last year, but was supported in the municipal budget. Grants will also be made to the Joe Kreisler Teen Center and Florence House Women's Shelter, with \$150,000 also going to community policing programs.

To help provide permanent homes for chronically homeless people, Community Housing of Maine will receive a \$250,000 grant. City Finance Director Brendan O'Connell estimated April 9 the change in state reimbursements for Oxford Street Shelter from operations costs to a per-client fee could result in the loss of \$820,000.

Efforts to shift clients to permanent housing are also a focal point of the Emergency Solutions Grant of \$162,000, with homeless prevention staffing funding at the city's shelter for families almost double to \$52,000 and rapid rehousing programs at Oxford Street increased to \$55,000 from \$43,000.

The Portland Jobs Alliance will receive \$340,000 of the funding for job training programs, with the remainder going to the Portland Microenterprise Assistance Program.

Available grant funding was not only reduced from last year, but requests continue to outpace available dollars, with a gap of about \$1.6 million for the most basic CDBG grant, Hill Christian said.

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