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Written Comments

Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report Year 39

People's Emergency Center Community Development Corporation (PECCDC) appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony to the City's Office of Housing and Community Development on this year's CAPER and neighborhood housing and community development needs.

PEC nurtures families, strengthens neighborhoods, and drives change. We are committed to increasing equity and opportunity throughout our entire community. We provide comprehensive supportive services to homeless women and their children, revitalize our West Philadelphia neighborhood, and advocate for social justice.

Since 1992, PEC's community development arm (PECCDC) has provided an array of real estate, economic development, and quality of life programs to transform the West Powelton, Saunders Park and Mantua neighborhoods into a community of choice, a community in which people choose to live, work and thrive. Our comprehensive approach to neighborhood revitalization builds upon neighborhood assets and responds directly to the needs of the community.

Thank you for offering the opportunity to submit testimony to strongly advocate for ongoing funding for affordable housing and neighborhood economic development. Most importantly, from everyone at PEC, we want to thank OHCD for its substantial support over the years. The general operating funds provided are essential to our organization's continued survival. OHCD's additional funding and support through the Housing Trust Fund, the state Elm Street Program, and the NAC Program allow PEC to further carry out its mission.

We respectfully submit the following recommendations:

1. Increase funding for the Basic Systems Repair Program, the Weatherization Assistance Program, and residential façade improvements

We believe that stable homes build stable communities. As PEC's neighborhoods in West Philadelphia continue to revitalize and attract new investment, it's important that residents have access to resources that will allow them to succeed as homeowners. Through our Neighborhood Advisory Committee (NAC) PEC has received numerous requests for information on home repair assistance. In fact, these types of inquiries are often the most frequent. We encourage OHCD to request additional funding and support for PHDC's Basic Systems Repair Program and the Weatherization Program. While these programs have helped numerous homeowners over the years, we recognize the limited capacity the city has in managing these programs. Often neighbors report a wait list that extends three years or more. Increased support would allow the city to assist more homeowners and reduce this wait time significantly.

We also encourage OHCD to consider requesting additional funds for residential façade improvements. As an Elm Street community PEC has had the privilege of tapping into committed DCED funding to support a residential façade program in our service area, which over 100 homeowners have benefitted from throughout the years. We hope to continue this program into the future through the assistance of Keystone Communities funding and the support of OHCD.

2. Expand Property Tax Relief Programs and Services

While PEC commends the city in implementing a Homestead Exemption and introducing the Longtime Owner Occupants Program (LOOP), we believe that these programs can be further extended so that more homeowners can benefit from them. PEC advocates for extending eligibility for the LOOP program to homeowners who bought their homes with the help of federal or state assistance. We also request an increase in the income guidelines for the Low-Income Senior Tax Freeze so that more seniors, especially those in neighborhoods such as ours which are experiencing the effects of gentrification, may be eligible for this program. Ideally, seniors who qualify for a tax freeze but have yet to receive one should be able to revert back to their pre-AVI assessment.

We also believe that more can be done to ensure that homeowners with property-tax issues are aware that these programs exist. According to city data released back in July, as many as 3 in 10 Philadelphia homeowners who qualified for the Homestead Exemption did not receive it. We advocate for increased funding to housing counseling agencies and Neighborhood Advisory Committees so that they may offer additional outreach and assistance to those who are eligible for these programs but have yet to apply. Better data can also be collected to identify these households. Similar to how OHCD manages the Foreclosure Diversion Program, an outside agency could potentially be hired to assist with this.

3. Expand commitment from the General Fund to support neighborhood economic development

Thriving commercial corridors are critical to the overall health of Philadelphia neighborhoods. PEC applauds Mayor Nutter and City Council for their continued support of the city's CDC Tax Credit Program, which will leverage tens of millions of dollars in private and public investment, attract new businesses to our neighborhoods, create new jobs, and grow the city's tax base. Under this program, we have been able to improve Lancaster Avenue with capacity building training for existing business owners, façade improvements, cleaning services, new trash receptacles, and new businesses. We also support the continuation of the Targeted Corridor Revitalization Management Program and the Commercial Corridor Cleaning Program, both of which PEC have benefitted from in our efforts to enhance Lancaster Avenue. We urge the Nutter Administration to work with Council to provide \$2 million in new General Fund dollars to supplement the CDBG resources for these programs. Committing additional funding to these programs would allow the Commerce Department to expand these programs to many more corridors throughout the city, including those not eligible to receive CDBG funding because of federal program restrictions.

4. Expand commitment from the General Fund and/or Capital Budget

Given the dramatic reductions in federal and state funding for housing and community development over the past few years, it is imperative that the City expand its commitment from the General Fund and/or Capital Budget for affordable housing, neighborhood economic development, and implementation of an effective Philadelphia Land Bank. Because of the challenges of using CDBG funds to support certain types of neighborhood economic development, we urge the City to follow in the footsteps of previous Administrations and provide more flexible resources.

Once again, we appreciate the past support OHCD and other City agencies have given to PECCDC and the CDC community. We believe that we have consistently provided an important return on this public investment. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide these comments.

Respectfully submitted,

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