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REVIEW OF APPLIED URBAN RESEARCH

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COLLEGE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

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UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA

Vol. 3, No. 7

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT NEEDS IN RURAL NEBRASKA*

An Analysis of Preapplications for HUD Community Development Funds

BY

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Introduction

Many small communities in rural Nebraska are faced with a wide variety of community needs and an inadequate source of funds with which to meet these needs. This fact was made quite clear in this study of the preapplications for Community Development funds which were recently submitted to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) by small communities in the State's rural areas outside the metropolitan regions of Omaha, Lincoln and Sioux City.

Two earlier issues of the *Review* have contained articles pertaining to Title I--Community Development--of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974. The October, 1974 issue provided an overall summary of the Community Development Title, and the January, 1975 issue dealt with that Title's provisions for community development in small, rural communities. This article provides an analysis of the various projects proposed by rural Nebraska communities in their preapplications for Community Development funds. It gives particular attention to the funding levels requested to carry out these projects.

The article discusses the rating and selection criteria used by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to rank the preapplications and, finally, it examines the project proposals of those communities which were "encouraged" to submit full applications.

The Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 consolidated several existing categorical programs for community development into a new single program of Community Development Block grants. Those programs which were terminated included:

- Open Space-Urban Beautification-Historic Preservation Grants,
- Public Facility Loans,
- Water and Sewer and Neighborhood Facilities Grants,
- Urban Renewal and Neighborhood Development Program Grants,
- Model Cities Supplemental Grants, and
- Rehabilitation Loans (program to be ended one year from enactment).

The new Block Grant Program for community development combined the purposes, objectives, and eligible activities of these categorical programs.

For fiscal year 1975, Congress appropriated a total of \$2.45 billion for this new Community Development Program. That portion which was earmarked for the rural portions of Nebraska came to approximately \$2.5 million.

*The authors of this article wish to give a special note of thanks to the Omaha Area Office of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for providing access to the preapplications submitted as well as providing the office space necessary to tabulate and analyze the data contained therein.

For small urban communities in rural areas to apply for these funds, HUD established a two-step application process; a preapplication step followed by a full application step. The purpose of the preapplication is basically to allow HUD to determine how well the application compares with similar applications from other jurisdictions, and to discourage applications which have little or no chance for funding before applicant communities incurred significant expenditures in preparing the more lengthy and detailed full application. The criteria used to make such determinations is discussed in a later section of this article.

Methodology

A total of 124 small communities throughout Nebraska submitted preapplications for HUD Community Development funds. Some preapplications contained as many as a dozen individual projects for which Community Development funds were being requested. Therefore, in order to ease the process of sorting out the various projects contained in the preapplications the applicant communities were divided into five groups according to population size. This permitted any major variations in the types of projects proposed by different-sized communities to be readily identified. Next, the individual project proposals were classified into several general categories. For example, all projects which concerned themselves with a community's water supply facilities were placed in the general "Water Systems" category. This was true whether the project called for minor repairs to an existing water system or major construction of a new water supply system. Similarly, when a project concerned itself with a community center, it was classified as a "Community Center" project, regardless of whether the requested funds were to be used for the actual construction of such a facility or merely to acquire and improve a site for future construction. No effort was made to determine the eligibility of the various projects according to the Act. The only criteria used was whether or not Community Development funds were being requested for the project. The number of projects in each general category, as well as the total amount of funds requested for these projects, was

TABLE 1 PROPOSALS AND TOTAL FUNDS REQUESTED BY PROJECT CATEGORY AND COMMUNITY POPULATION GROUPS												
Project Category	Group I Under 1,000 Population		Group II 1,000-2,500 Population		Group III 2,500-5,000 Population		Group IV 5,000-10,000 Population		Group V Over 10,000 Population		State-wide Total	
	No.	Funds Requested	No.	Funds Requested	No.	Funds Requested	No.	Funds Requested	No.	Funds Requested	No.	Funds Requested
Cultural Facilities	1	\$ 20,000		---		---		---		---	1	\$ 20,000
Senior Centers	1	22,500		---		---	1	\$ 160,000		---	2	182,500
Community Centers	9	599,500*	1	\$ 50,000	3	\$ 700,000*	2	555,000		---	15	1,904,500*
Rehabilitation/Demolition	5	112,000*	5	269,400		---	6	1,331,500*	3	\$ 60,000*	19	1,772,900*
Low Income/Elderly Housing	4	232,400	2	90,000		---	1	75,000		---	7	397,400
Parks & Recreation	12	494,700*	6	889,700	4	424,400*	8	1,082,200*	6	1,682,000*	36	4,573,000*
CBD Facilities	1	28,000		---	1	35,000	1	67,500	1	30,000	4	160,500
Industrial Attractions	1	100,000	1	30,000		---		---	1	171,000	3	301,000
Historic Preservation	3	27,000		---	1	243,000		---	1	100,000	5	370,000
Police/Fire Protection	5	211,800		---	1	45,000	4	2,667,176	1	210,620	11	3,134,596
Water Systems	37	3,784,100*	8	2,038,800*	3	1,617,000*	1	156,378	3	1,376,800*	52	8,973,078*
Sanitary Sewers	16	1,103,700	4	234,000*	2	74,000*	3	298,000*		---	25	1,709,700*
Storm Sewers	1	*	1	90,000		---	4	264,493*	2	245,000*	8	599,493*
Solid Waste Systems	4	46,000*	1	50,000	1	75,000	2	395,000		---	8	566,000*
Street Improvements	7	832,750	4	475,000		---	2	790,600*	2	*	15	2,098,350*
Transportation		---	1	24,400		---		---	1	40,000	2	64,400
Miscellaneous Projects	2	211,250		---	1	125,000		---		---	3	336,250
Program Management		---		---		---	1	20,000		---	1	20,000
Comprehensive Plans	1	*	1	6,000		---		---		---	2	6,000*
**		722,600		132,800		919,600		749,156		2,318,831		4,842,987
Total		\$8,548,300		\$4,380,100		\$4,258,000		\$8,612,003		\$6,234,251		\$32,032,654
*Does not include project amounts for which no specific funding level was indicated in the preapplication. **Funds requested but not identified for specific projects.												

tabulated for each of the five population groups of applicant communities. After the variations among the five community groups were analyzed the figures were added together to provide a State-wide total for each project category.

Summary of Preapplications

This section summarizes the project proposals and the funding levels requested, first, according to the five community groups, and then on a State-wide basis. Full results of the preapplication data tabulations are presented in Table 1. The number of preapplications submitted and funds requested, summarized by community population group, are presented in Table 2.

Communities Under 1,000 Population. By far the largest number of communities submitting preapplications were in this population group: 67 out of a total of 124. Public utilities-related projects predominated, with approximately 33 percent of the proposed projects concerned with the improvement of water supply systems. The amount of funds requested for Water Systems projects in this population group of applicant communities amounted to over \$3,780,000. The next most common type of project dealt with the improvement or installation of sanitary sewer systems. There were 16 projects of this nature proposed, with funding requests totaling approximately \$1,103,000. Other project categories which predominated in this population group were Parks and Recreation, Community Centers and Street Improvements. The total funds requested for all projects by the 67 communities in this population group alone came to over \$8.5 million; a figure considerably higher than the total allocation of \$2.5 million for all of rural Nebraska.

Communities of 1,000 Through 2,500 Population. There were 23 communities in this population group submitting preapplications. Again, projects providing for improved water systems were most numerous, with eight communities requesting over \$2,000,000. Six communities proposed activities in the Parks and Recreation category, requesting funds in the amount of \$889,700. Rehabilitation/Demolition projects totaling

TABLE 2 PREAPPLICATIONS SUBMITTED AND FUNDS REQUESTED BY COMMUNITIES IN EACH POPULATION GROUP				
Population Group	Preapplications Submitted	Percent	Funds Requested	Percent
Under 1,000	67	54.0	\$ 8,548,300	26.7
1,000-2,500	23	18.6	4,380,100	13.7
2,500-5,000	10	8.1	4,258,000	13.3
5,000-10,000	15	12.1	8,612,003	26.9
Over 10,000	9	7.2	6,234,251	19.4
Totals	124	100.0	\$32,032,654	100.0

\$269,400 and Street Improvements projects totaling \$475,000 were also proposed.

Communities of 2,500 Through 5,000 Population. Only ten applicant communities fell within this group. Most numerous in their preapplications were Parks and Recreation projects, with requests exceeding \$424,000. Although projects dealing with water systems were not as numerous, they represented the largest category in terms of funds requested, with over \$1,617,000 being applied for. One-third of these communities requested in excess of \$700,000 for the future construction of Community Centers in their jurisdictions.

Communities of 5,000 Through 10,000 Population. Fifteen communities in this population group submitted preapplications, with funds requested totaling more than \$8,600,000. This was the greatest amount of funds requested by any of the five groups of applicant communities, as indicated by Table 2. Requests for Parks and Recreation projects predominated, with funds requested totaling \$1,682,000. Funds requested for Police and Fire Protection projects totaled \$2,667,000. Rehabilitation/Demolition projects also ranked high in this community group, with six communities requesting over \$1,331,000 for such projects.

Communities of Over 10,000 Population. There were only nine applicant communities in this group. Total funds requested, however, amounted to more than \$6,200,000. Six communities proposed projects in the Parks and Recreation category, requesting funds in the amount of \$1,682,000. Three of these communities applied for a total of \$1,376,800 to improve their water systems.

State-wide Total. As might be expected, a State-wide analysis of the project proposals indicated that Water Systems projects predominated both in terms of the number of projects as well as in terms of the total amount of Community Development funds requested. There were 52 such projects, with total funds requested of over \$8,900,000. Parks and Recreation projects were second, with 36 projects requesting \$4,572,800 in funds. Next came Police/Fire Protection projects, with funding requests totaling \$3,134,596. Other project categories for which considerable demand was indicated and for which funding in excess of \$1,000,000 was requested included Street Improvements, Community Centers, Rehabilitation/Demolition, and Sanitary Sewers. In all, more than \$32,000,000 in Community Development funds were requested by the 124 applying communities, exceeding the total fund allocation to rural Nebraska communities by 1,280 percent.

HUD's Rating and Selection Criteria

Faced with such a large assortment of project proposals and having available only a fraction of the funds requested, one can understand the dilemma of those whose responsibility it was to assign priority to the various preapplications. The Act, however, provided that each application be rated according to 1970 census data for proportion of poverty (percent of persons in the community with incomes below the poverty level), extent of poverty (number of persons in the community with income

below the poverty level), amount of substandard housing (percent of housing units lacking some or all plumbing facilities), and the community's total population. Each preapplication was assigned as much as 30 points for each of these four rating criteria, depending on how each compared with State averages. Those preapplications which did not accumulate at least 50 points in this initial rating matrix were discouraged from incurring the additional expense of preparing a final application.

Those preapplications which accumulated at least 50 points were then given further consideration based on the following criteria:

- (1) Imminent Threat---based on relative degree of emergency,
- (2) Population/Economy Change---based on any impact from national policy decisions or direct Federal program decisions, and the ability of the program to offset or mitigate the effects of sudden spurts or declines in growth,
- (3) Joint Applications---applications submitted by two or more units of general local government with proposed activities designed to implement community development plans on an areawide basis, and
- (4) Program Impact---based on the program's ability to deal with the needs of the community and its relationship to the objectives of the Act.

Again, varying amounts of points were assigned to each of the above categories. These points were, in turn, added to the points accumulated in the initial rating procedure.

Those applications which achieved a final rating of 80 or more total points were those which were encouraged to submit full applications. Of the 124 preapplications submitted from rural Nebraska communities, only 18 achieved such a rating.

The nature of the rating system favors the larger communities with high *amounts* of substandard housing and poverty, and works to the disadvantage of the smaller communities even though they may have high *percentages* of substandard housing and poverty. The "greatest good for the greatest number of people" adage seemed to apply.

"Encouraged" Communities

As was mentioned earlier, 18 small Nebraska communities were "encouraged" to submit full applications for community development funds. However, the funding levels "encouraged" were in many cases considerably lower than the funding levels requested. Table 3 shows the total funds requested by "encouraged" communities in each population group as well as the funding levels encouraged by HUD for each community group.

What types of projects received encouragement? Table 4 shows, by community, the encouraged projects as well as the corresponding funding level encouraged by HUD. Again, Water Systems projects were at the top of the list, with seven communities encouraged to submit applications for projects of this nature. Six communities were encouraged to submit Rehabilitation/Demolition projects. Other activities which fared well included one Community Center project, three Low Income/Elderly Housing projects, three Parks and Recreation projects, two Sanitary Sewer projects, and two Street Improvement projects.

HUD encouraged applications for a total of \$3,201,000 worth of community development activities. Additional funding reductions will, therefore, be necessary on the full application level in order to bring this amount in line with the funds available to non-metropolitan areas. Full applications have already been submitted by these communities, and funding determinations are forthcoming.

TABLE 3
PREAPPLICATIONS SUBMITTED, FUNDS REQUESTED, AND FUNDS ENCOURAGED
BY ENCOURAGED COMMUNITIES IN EACH POPULATION GROUP

Population Group	Communities	Percent	Amount Requested	Percent	Amount Encouraged by HUD	Percent
Under 1,000	5	27.8	\$1,022,700	15.4	\$ 312,700	9.8
1,000-2,500	6	33.3	1,734,000	26.1	1,134,000	35.4
2,500-5,000	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
5,000-10,000	3	16.7	977,656	14.7	829,000	25.9
Over 10,000	4	22.2	2,905,800	43.8	925,000	28.9
Totals	18	100.0	\$6,640,156	100.0	\$3,200,700	100.0

TABLE 4
COMMUNITIES, ACTIVITIES AND FUNDING LEVELS ENCOURAGED BY HUD

Community	"Encouraged" Activity	Amount "Encouraged"
Alliance	Street and Storm Sewer Improvements	\$ 300,000
Atkinson	Water System Improvements	250,000
Cedar Rapids	Sanitary Sewer and Water System Improvements	60,000
Crawford	Water System Improvements	300,000
Crofton	Water System Improvements	70,000
Elgin	Site Acquisition for Low Income/Elderly Housing	75,000
Fairbury	Construction of Community Center	300,000
Falls City	Urban Redevelopment Project	229,000
Franklin	Site Acquisition for Low Income/Elderly Housing and Housing Rehabilitation	160,000
Hartington	Water System Improvements	280,000
Hastings	Housing Rehabilitation, Storm Sewer Improvements, and Acquisition of Land for Park Development	245,000
Kearney	Water System Improvements and Playground Development	200,000
Loup City	Rehabilitation/Demolition Project	40,000
Norfolk	Housing Rehabilitation and Street Improvements for Handicapped	250,000
Scottsbluff	Park Development in Low Income Neighborhoods	230,000
Talmage	Site Acquisition for Low Income/Elderly Housing	7,700
Verdigre	Housing Rehabilitation	100,000
Wilber	Water System Improvements	104,000
Total		\$3,200,700

Conclusions

The data offered here strongly indicate that the funds made available to rural Nebraska for community development were not adequate to serve the needs of those communities. The same situation is likely to occur when Community Development funds are made available in fiscal year 1976. Communities must, therefore, be aware of the selection criteria used by HUD to allocate funds, and must tailor their proposals accordingly. The degree to which a community's overall community develop-

ment program addresses itself to the objectives of the Act has a direct relationship to the points the applicant will accumulate for "program impact." Finally, small communities should make an effort to deal with their needs on an area-wide basis. Two or more communities with a single plan to meet their joint needs would receive the additional priority given joint applications. Moreover, in joint applications the poverty, substandard housing and population figures of the participating communities would be aggregated, thus further raising their position in the rating process.

SURVEY OF PUBLIC OPINION

Election of School Board Members by District

It may be thought that recent Nebraska legislation requiring the Omaha Public School District (OPS) to elect its board members by district rather than at large is controversial. Yet slightly more than half of the OPS residents interviewed by CAUR agreed with the change, 38 percent disagreed and 10 percent replied they "didn't know."

That the law would create better representation for all areas was, however, affirmed by even greater percentages of interviewees than the percentages in agreement with the legislation. Although some were opposed to the enactment, they

apparently thought it would provide greater representation for all areas.

Nor did most feel that the change was a racial issue. Indeed, as much as 72 percent of the Blacks interviewed replied, "No," to this possibility; 54 percent, Whites. These were among the major findings that emerged from a telephone survey among 515 men and women living in the Omaha Public School District. Interviewing for this survey was completed during the period June 2, through June 5, 1975 by members of the Center for Applied Urban Research Interviewing Staff. Details of the survey are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1 ELECTION OF SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS BY DISTRICT							
Question	Total n=515	Males n=142	Females n=373	White n=447 (percentage)	Black n=68	Have Children in Omaha Public Schools	
						Yes n=147	No n=368
1. Do you agree or disagree with legislation requiring the Omaha Public School District to elect its board members by District rather than at large?							
Agree	52.2	51.4	52.5	48.3	77.9	61.9	48.4
Disagree	38.3	40.1	37.5	42.1	13.2	30.6	41.3
Don't know	9.5	8.5	9.4	9.6	8.8	7.5	10.3
2. Do you feel this will create better representation for all areas of the school district?							
Yes	61.7	62.0	61.7	58.4	83.8	70.1	58.4
No	31.1	33.1	30.3	34.5	8.8	24.5	33.7
Don't know	6.6	4.9	7.2	6.5	7.4	5.4	7.1
No answer	.6	0.0	.8	.7	0.0	0.0	.8
3. Do you feel this is a racial issue?							
Yes	36.5	43.0	34.0	38.7	22.1	29.9	39.1
No	56.7	50.7	59.0	54.4	72.0	66.7	52.7
Don't know	6.8	6.3	7.0	6.9	5.9	3.4	8.2
n=sample size							

New Jail for Douglas County

Most people in Omaha prefer that the new corrections center be located in a sparsely populated area, according to a survey conducted by CAUR at the request of Douglas County Commissioner Michael Albert. Almost half of the 504 interviewed by telephone expressed the opinion that the jail should be in a non-populated area; one fourth thought downtown; about 29 percent had no preference.

Almost a third surveyed said that, in their opinion, a downtown jail would hinder business development there. About 45 percent, though, believed it would have no affect. Others--12 percent--didn't know whether it would or would not influence downtown business. The same percentage thought it would help downtown business development. Table 2 provides details of the poll which was conducted during the period June 12 through June 14, 1975.

CAUR RESEARCH MILESTONES

THE SANITARY AND IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT AS A MECHANISM FOR URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The Center for Applied Urban Research (CAUR) has recently completed a comprehensive study of Nebraska's Sanitary and Improvement Districts. "SID's," as they are popularly referred to, are public corporations established under Nebraska State law to install and maintain urban improvements such as parks, sewers, sidewalks, streets, and utilities in new urban areas. Since the State law authorizing their creation was passed in 1949, almost 400 SID's have been established--mostly in Douglas and Sarpy Counties.

In 1974 the Miscellaneous Subjects Committee of the Nebraska State Legislature held hearings on SID's to establish a basis for subsequent legislation. The study by CAUR was commissioned by the Nebraska Legislature to look further into the complicated subject of SID's. CAUR's report deals with three broad SID topics: (1) the SID development process,

(2) the fiscal structure of SID's, and (3) participants in the SID process.

During the course of the study CAUR coded and computerized data on the financial operations of 80 selected SID's in Douglas County, analyzed the debt structure of approximately 380 past and present SID's in Douglas and Sarpy Counties, analyzed the impact of annexed SID's on Omaha's debt structure and property tax rate, and interviewed approximately 50 individuals connected with SID's including developers, public officials and residents in SID's.

Recommendations for increasing the effectiveness of the SID mechanism are presented in the final Chapter of the 114 page report.

The major findings of the study will be published in a future issue of the *Review*.

TABLE 2 NEW JAIL IN DOUGLAS COUNTY			
Question	Total n=504 (percentage)	Males n=137 (percentage)	Females n=367 (percentage)
1. A new jail is to be built in Douglas County. In your opinion, what is the best location?			
Downtown	25.2	37.2	20.7
Away from populated areas	46.2	38.7	49.0
No preference	28.6	24.1	30.2
2. In your opinion, would a jail in downtown Omaha help or hinder business development there?			
Help	12.3	16.8	10.6
Hinder	31.0	29.9	31.3
No effect	44.6	45.3	44.4
Don't know	12.1	8.0	13.6
n=sample size			

COMPREHENSIVE MANPOWER PROGRAM RESEARCH

The Center for Applied Urban Research (CAUR) has subcontracted with the City of Omaha (Comprehensive Manpower Program) to carry out two studies in the manpower area. Dr. David Hinton, Senior Research Fellow at CAUR, is principal investigator for both studies.

The first of these studies has three primary purposes: (1) to determine the attitudes and training needs of the working-age population who reside in the low-income areas of Omaha; (2) to develop a profile of Comprehensive Manpower Program (CMP) clients, including their attitudes

toward the various component phases of the CMP training process, their reasons for terminating their training and their success in finding work after training; and (3) to determine employer attitudes toward CMP clients, suggestions for training changes and, in those cases where CMP clients have not been hired, to determine why.

The purpose of the second study is to provide employment projections by industry and selected occupations for the Omaha SMSA. This study will identify future occupations with growth potential as guidelines for planning CMP training programs in the future.

AN ECONOMIC STUDY OF LAND USE DEVELOPMENT

The Center for Applied Urban Research (CAUR) has subcontracted with the Title V Rural Development Council for Nebraska to study the economic costs of alternative land use development patterns in small Nebraska communities. This research is being financed through Title V of the Rural Development Act of 1972. Dr. Paul S.T. Lee, Research Associate at CAUR, is principal investigator.

The major purpose of the study is to assess the economic impact associated with different patterns of land use development in rural Nebraska. The hypothesis underlying the inquiry is that economic costs are higher with a scattered and fragmented development pattern than with a compact development pattern in which new development takes place adjacent to a community's urban fringe. Historical cost data with respect to each development pattern will be obtained and analyzed against this hypothesis. The research will also

examine the social and environmental effects associated with each development pattern.

The community of Gretna, Nebraska will be used as the subject for this study. Gretna, one of the most rapidly growing communities in rural Nebraska during the past 15 years, has experienced both types of development--compact growth on the urban fringe and scattered, fragmented growth in the surrounding agricultural area. Thus, it is an almost ideal subject area in which to study the impacts of both of these development patterns.

Although the study will be confined to the Gretna community, principles derived from the study should be applicable to rural communities throughout the State and particularly in the Platte and Elkhorn Valley corridors where many small communities are beginning to experience growth pressures similar to those experienced by Gretna in the last 15 years.

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