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Concord divvies up grant money to help homeless, elderly, disabled

By Paul Thissen
Contra Costa Times

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CONCORD — Compared with the entire city budget, it's a drop in the bucket.

But for the nonprofit organizations that sought grants from the city, it was not a big enough drop.

This year Concord will get \$1,103,867 from the federal government in Community Development Block Grants, according to a city staff report.

About a third will go to infrastructure improvements to make the city more accessible to people with disabilities. Another third will go to the city's housing and neighborhood preservation programs.

Except for overhead, the remainder is earmarked for public service organizations. But federal law blocks the city from spending more than 15 percent of its block grant on such nonprofit organizations.

Of the 36 public service organizations that applied for a grant from Concord, only 19 got one. And only five stand to get as much as they asked for, with most grants ranging from \$10,000 to \$20,000, according to the city report.

And that does not include other nonprofit organizations that sought money for economic development or infrastructure projects. None of them will get funding.

A majority of public service grant money will go to organizations that help the homeless, including the Contra Costa Crisis Center, the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano, SHELTER Inc. and the Monument Crisis Center.

Others that will get grants provide services to the elderly and victims of domestic violence.

The Mt. Diablo Unified School District's CARES after-school program also will get a \$34,000 grant out of a special child care fund which comes from development fees, according to the city staff report.

In addition to the federal money and the developer's fees for child care, Concord used to kick in extra money from its general fund. But that money has been slashed because of budget cuts, and will be gone completely after next year.

The City Council voiced its support to the allocations Tuesday for the allocations, which are initially set by the city's Community Services Commission.

The council will take a final vote in May.

The Community Services Commission does the legwork of reviewing applications from nonprofit organizations and deciding how to parcel out the limited funds.

And the City Council is loathe to change those recommendations because of the expertise the commission builds up, Mayor Guy Bjerke said.

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"I think it's the most fair way," said Vice Mayor Helen Allen. "We get (the commission) to do the work and we're off the hook."

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