

ARLINGTON ADVOCATE

OPINION: National Community Development Week illuminates Arlington's dedication to equity

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Arlington is celebrating National Community Development Week (CD Week) during the week of April 5-9. CD Week is an annual opportunity to shine a light on the organizations and programs that serve people who make low- to moderate-incomes, seniors, people with disabilities and all Arlington residents throughout the year. These critical community services contribute to making Arlington an inclusive and resilient community.

CD Week is also a chance to draw attention to the impact of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. Since 1975, Arlington has been a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Entitlement Community. This designation means that the town has received an annual grant from the federal government for the past 46 years, for use in the development of a viable urban community, particularly for the purposes of creating decent housing, a suitable living environment and expanded economic opportunities available and accessible to people who make low- to moderate-incomes.

Each year, thousands of Arlington residents are beneficiaries of CDBG funds through a range of programs and activities. During the 2020-21 program year, CDBG is supporting 16 public service programs, two affordable housing initiatives, two economic development programs and six public facility improvement activities in Arlington. CDBG enables these organizations and agencies to leverage their budgets to create even greater community impact. A \$400,000 grant through CDBG enabled Arlington EATS to leverage funds raised through its capital campaign. Collectively, these funds are supporting the construction of a new market which will serve residents facing food insecurity. Annually, CDBG supports scholarship programs offered by the Arlington Boys and Girls Club, Fidelity House, Arlington High School Athletics and through the Arlington Recreation Department that ensure equitable access to excellent recreational programming to the youth in our community.

CDBG helps make Arlington a more inclusive, equitable community — but this funding is not guaranteed. Each year, Congress appropriates funds to entitlement communities on a formula basis. The town is grateful for our Massachusetts congressional delegation's recognition of the importance of CDBG in communities like Arlington and urge their continued prioritization of it during the congressional budget process this year.

Over the course of the past year, Arlingtonians have experienced profound disruptions to daily life. Yet, despite the challenges of this year and the near-impossibility of gathering in person, there have been bright spots. Countless stories of individuals, organizations and businesses stepping up and contributing to the greater good continue to inspire us.

Among these standouts are several CDBG recipient organizations, some of which received additional financial support through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which provided \$980,388 in additional funding aimed exclusively at efforts addressing the pandemic in Arlington. In 2020, Food Link, which received CDBG support for both its new building and for programming, more than doubled the number of Arlington residents to whom it provided groceries on a regular basis. When staff at Fidelity House realized they would have to limit the number of participants in their summer camp due to the pandemic, they made sure to reserve spaces for participants receiving scholarships, whose spaces were supported by CDBG.

The CARES Act funds continue to provide support in the form of rental assistance to 57 households, working capital and technical assistance to 46 small businesses, and programmatic support to nonprofit organizations and town departments responding to the pandemic. While we eagerly look forward to the end of the pandemic, we know that its ripple effects will continue to be felt even when its impacts are less immediate. CDBG will be a tool of continuity to ensure that no one is left behind as our community recovers from the pandemic.

Through a social media campaign and online resources, the Department of Planning and Community Development has featured the people and organizations that fuel community development in Arlington. Please join us Thursday, April 8, at 5 p.m. for a panel on food insecurity that will showcase Food Link and Arlington EATS, two organizations vital to the community that have provided essential services, particularly during the pandemic. We encourage you to register to the panel, and to visit the town's website and social media pages to learn about the impressive breadth and depth of these efforts. A good place to start is arlingtonma.gov/cdbg.

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