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City Council presents prioritized community needs list

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Lancaster City Council presented its list of prioritized community needs during a public hearing at the Feb. 28 City Council meeting. The list will decide what projects are funded and when.

The first two items have already been addressed. The No. 1 priority was to address storm water and drainage for the Taylor Street area. No. 2 was to repair, replace and install city sidewalks in low- to moderate-income areas.

The other 17 items on the list include five improvements to wastewater or water plants, four items bringing a new program or building to the city and efforts to beautify and upkeep existing properties and areas.

The funding for these projects will come from a series of grants the city has applied for, with Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) being the largest.

In 2023, “South Carolina’s CDBG program will receive an estimated \$19.7 million from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD),” said Christine Schwartz with Catawba Regional Council of Governments.

“The funding is not for individuals, not for businesses, not for nonprofit organizations, not for water and sewer authorities — it has to be a local government,” she said.

CDBG grants must address one of three areas for funding: benefit low- to moderate-income persons, eliminate slums and blight, or address urgent community needs that pose a serious threat to the health or welfare of the community.

Eligible public improvements include water, sewer, roads, drainage clearance, downtown streetscape infrastructure, adult literacy facilities, new sidewalks and job-training facilities in low- to moderate-income areas.

“The programs are all competitive, so we have to apply to each of them,” Schwartz said. “The funding rounds are currently offered twice a year in the spring and in the fall. The project has to be at least \$50,000 and the maximum grant funding just depends on which project and what type it is.”

There are also neighborhood revitalization grants, local priorities grants and business development grants the city could pursue.

Although not on the initial list, council added repairing storm-water drainage on Ferguson Street and repairing 15 inches of sewer line on Almetta Street.

Lancaster Mayor Alston DeVenny said some water and sewage systems in the city are almost 150 years old, which warrant repairs.

He also suggested the city work with Lancaster County to ensure more CDBG county funds come to the city of Lancaster, as that is where the majority of LMI housing is in the county.

“I mean, the majority of low- and moderate-income (people) tend to live here,” DeVenny said. “We have more housing here, traditional housing here. We have low- to moderate-income housing here. There’s some areas that don’t have low and moderate income, or very little.”

DeVenny said this prioritization process highlighted areas where the city could work with Lancaster County to ensure funding goes in to improving low-to moderate-income areas in the city.

“Somebody will take the money if the county doesn’t,” DeVenny said.