

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
Meeting on August 18, 2025 – 2:00 p.m.
County Office Complex, Meeting Room 424

Sub-Committee Members Attending:

Jason Bennett, Chair
Steve Hout
Dottie Ruby
Sam Wilson

Also Attending:

Victoria Norman, Recording Secretary
Senator Mike McKay

Not Present:

Jenny Krampf

The discussion centers on reviewing and narrowing down grant requests, as there are far more requests than available funds. Jason Bennett and others talk about whether they should limit future requests but agree flexibility is needed in case large, high-priority projects arise. Several requests are considered unsuitable for funding, especially those that could be covered by Program Open Space or other grants. The group emphasizes prioritizing town projects, as commissioners and delegates want to see those supported, while also questioning certain requests that lack detail or may be inflated. They plan to request more information on specific proposals, acknowledging that most applications will be denied given the limited \$540,000 available.

The group continues reviewing grant requests, identifying errors such as a misplaced decimal that inflated a \$7,500 request into \$75,000. They revisit which projects can be funded through Program Open Space, noting that certain school or religious-affiliated projects are ineligible due to restricted public access. Jason Bennett emphasizes prioritizing towns and balancing funding between municipalities and nonprofits, with some town projects seen as one-time needs that won't return for future requests. They also flag unusually high costs, like Frostburg's fire alarm system, and agree to gather quotes and clarifications before decisions. Questions arise about newer or lesser-known organizations, like Allegheny Compass, and the need to verify missions and details before approving funding.

The group continues evaluating funding requests, this time examining detailed quotes and cost breakdowns for projects. They agree that some requests could be partially funded, such as

flooring repairs or fencing, and note the importance of prioritizing essential needs. The Allegany Arts Council's request is questioned since its building purchase plans have fallen through, leading Jason Bennett to suggest putting that request on hold. Habitat for Humanity's flooding damage request is reviewed, but the committee finds inconsistencies in fan pricing—ranging from \$661 to nearly \$1,000 per unit—prompting doubts about accuracy. Overall, the discussion highlights their scrutiny of inflated or unclear costs, emphasizing that with limited funds and an 80% denial rate, only well-documented and necessary projects will be considered.

The committee continues scrutinizing funding requests, emphasizing partial awards and denials where appropriate. Habitat for Humanity's fan request is questioned due to unclear pricing and the necessity of fans for flood damage, leading them to mark it as zero. Several other projects, including those from the Historical Society, Allegany Museum, and a Youth Enrichment Program, are also either denied or reduced because of prior funding and competing needs. Requests from religious organizations, like Mountainside Ministries, are rejected over concerns about opening the door for all churches to apply, while groups like AHEC-West are cut because they have access to other funding streams. Smaller, clear, and essential requests—such as equipment for Bedford Road and turnout gear for emergency services—receive tentative approval for partial funding, reflecting the group's priority to spread limited resources fairly and effectively.

The committee continues weighing project requests, debating which to fully or partially fund. Some operational requests are dismissed as not fitting the criteria, while others, like Cumberland's decorative fencing for outdoor dining, receive tentative partial funding of \$20,000. Frostburg's drinking water project is denied since MDE is expected to cover it, while their fire alarm system may be funded at half cost. Fire company sprinkler system upgrades are also considered for partial support pending quotes. Additional allocations are discussed for the Cumberland Cultural Foundation's security system, cemetery maintenance, and Cumberland Theater's sound and lighting, though concerns remain about prior funding levels and inflated or vague requests.

The committee continues narrowing down requests, moving several projects to Program Open Space funding, such as Ellerslie's pavilion add-on. The Embassy Theater's request to purchase its building is debated, with concern that funding might be wasted if the group cannot secure full financing, so the decision is postponed. Friends Aware's LED and HVAC requests are deferred pending quotes, while Frostburg Fire Department's facility upgrades are denied due to lack of attachment to the main station. Some proposals, like Goodwill's \$20,000 gear locker replacement, are considered for partial funding, and Humpty Dumpty's \$100,000 childcare expansion is flagged for quotes because of its high cost despite clear community benefit.

The committee rejects LaVale's expensive EMS mannequin request, agreeing it should be purchased at the county level rather than by a single department. They then review a proposal for a Fun Factory Sensory Gym, but uncertainty about its location, nonprofit status, and community benefit leads them to request more details before considering funding. A laptop request for a rescue company is also denied, as tablets are seen as cheaper and more effective alternatives. Several other projects, such as Midland Fire Department and Old Town Community Center, are redirected to other funding sources like Program Open Space or deemed unnecessary this cycle. Smaller requests like Potomac's generator work are noted, but organizations that already received substantial funds last year are generally cut, with PVAA being zeroed out and Rawlings Volunteer's equipment request up next for review.

The committee reviews Rawlings Volunteer's request for hydraulic rescue equipment, noting its usefulness for tractor-trailer accidents and agreeing to fund half the cost. They then discuss a group that has repeatedly requested funding for renovations, deciding to allocate \$15,000 with the expectation that the project will be completed soon. The Salvation Army's \$80,000 HVAC request is conditionally approved, contingent on them securing the remaining \$120,000 in matching funds within a year. A smaller insulation and air conditioning request from the Heritage House is rejected, as members believe the organization has other resources to cover costs. Jason Bennett emphasizes that limited funds should prioritize critical public safety needs and town projects, noting that the county faces years of financial strain due to flood damage recovery.

The committee calculates that about \$230,000 has already been allocated, with roughly \$175,000 left uncommitted but many requests still unresolved. To stretch funding, they decide to split allocations, giving \$25,000 each to Barton and Midland, while also approving small amounts for groups like the Concert Association (\$3,000) and Tri-State Community Conservation (\$10,000). Some requests, such as for technology upgrades, are zeroed out due to lack of clear impact or justification. They note this year brought 54–55 requests, far more than last year's 32–34, making decisions harder. Remaining projects under review include the YMCA, Food Bank, Scenic Railroad, and Western Port Library, with some placed in question-mark status until quotes or more information are provided.

The committee reviews the YMCA's past funding, noting that \$250,000 was granted years ago for a new building that was never constructed. Due to dissatisfaction with the organization's accountability and past issues, they decide to allocate zero funds this round. Technical difficulties with their funding spreadsheet are identified and corrected, revealing clearer totals. Discussion also turns to the Embassy Theater, which is in poor financial and legal standing, leading members to firmly deny funding until it resolves back taxes and reporting issues. The meeting closes with updates about a recent fire-related electrical issue in a building, after

which the group agrees to gather answers to outstanding questions and reconvene in about two weeks to finalize decisions.

The committee spent the meeting reviewing over 50 funding requests, facing the challenge of dividing \$540,000 among more than \$2.5 million in asks. Many projects were denied outright, redirected to other funding sources like Program Open Space, or marked with question marks pending quotes and clarification. Priority was given to town projects, essential public safety needs, and nonprofits with broad community impact, though often at partial funding levels. Larger or less accountable organizations, such as the YMCA and Embassy Theater, were denied support due to past issues and lack of readiness. The group ended by planning to reconvene in September after gathering more information.

The meeting adjourned at 4:05 pm