



Kate Harrison
Councilmember District 4

CONSENT CALENDAR
May 14th, 2019

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Councilmembers Harrison and Wengraf, and Mayor Arreguin
Subject: Rebuilding Together Budget Referral

RECOMMENDATION

Refer to the budget process a two-year allocation to fund Rebuilding Together East Bay-North from the General Fund according to the Housing Advisory Commission recommendations, with an evaluation after the first 18 months to determine whether the organization's fiscal reporting would be in compliance with CDBG reporting requirements were the organization to apply again.

BACKGROUND

In the FY2020-2023 Community Agency Funding recommendations, Rebuilding Together East Bay-North applied for federal Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to fund two different projects: Safe at Home Project and Community Facility Improvement.

Rebuilding Together is a nonprofit that provides free rehabilitation and repairs to the homes of low-income seniors, disabled people, and veterans. Repairing existing housing stock is cheaper than building new housing, so organizations like this keep home ownership affordable in low-income and gentrifying communities. Repairing housing stock is also far more environmentally conscious than building new. Rebuilding Together rehabilitates homes for general livability, and also retrofit homes to be more accessible, green, and seismically fit. Rebuilding Together is focused on residents of South and Southwest Berkeley. At a special meeting of the Housing Advisory Commission on March 13, 2019, many individuals, including disabled and low-income senior homeowners, urged that the Commission continue funding Rebuilding Together due to the benefits they received to live in a safer environment.

The Safe at Home project provides qualified disabled seniors with safety modifications to their homes such as wheelchair ramps, exterior handrails, and grab bars in the bathroom. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, one in three adults aged 65 and older fall every year. Older adults are hospitalized for fall-related injuries five times more often than injuries from other causes. Yet upgrading a home to prevent falls is costly, labor-intensive, and out of reach for many seniors. The Safe at Home project can do carpentry, roofing, weatherization, painting, electrical work, and more at no cost to the homeowner.

The Community Facility Improvement project partners Rebuilding Together with other nonprofit agencies, senior centers, and cultural centers in Berkeley. Recently, through the Community Facility Improvement project, Rebuilding Together provided materials and labor worth thousands of dollars to the Women's Daytime Drop-In Center, including improving the building's foundation, bringing the site up to ADA compliance, correcting plumbing issues, and installing new gutters. Funding the Facility Improvement project assists not only Rebuilding Together, but community organizations across Berkeley and across the East Bay.

City staff did not recommend that Rebuilding Together receive the four-year CDBG grant for either project due to concerns over past deficiencies in financial reporting, but recognized the organization's deep community roots and excellent work in assisting lower-income residents in repairing their homes and remaining housed. These important community projects can be funded through the General Fund at prior year levels, with milestones set for evaluating reporting compliance.

The Housing Advisory Commission subcommittee on CDBG grants recognized Rebuilding Together's poor past financial performance. However, the executive director is no longer with the organization; a new bookkeeper has been hired and staff report that the organization has begun to comply with completing all needed reports. After a change in organizational leadership, stability can take some time. For that reason we request funding for the next two years, while acknowledging the possibility that Rebuilding Together will be fully compliant in the next year and CDBG funding may be appropriate for FY2021-2022, if surplus funds are available.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

\$98,275 for the Safe Home program and \$24,575 for the Community Facility Improvement program for a total of \$122,850 from the General Fund per year, or \$245,700 over two years.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Rebuilding Together can make old homes more energy efficient and reduce the carbon footprint of low-income homeowners.

CONTACT PERSON

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