

March 21, 2006

Testimony for Public Hearing
To the Sub Committee on Housing & Community Opportunity
at the Knox County Commissioners Office
on Friday, March 24, 2006

We are pleased to give testimony to the Sub Committee on Housing and Community Opportunity at a field hearing being held in the Knox County Commissioner's Office in Mount Vernon, Ohio.

We understand that the public hearing is entitled "Strengthening Rural Ohio – A Review of the Community Block Grant Program". The City of Mount Vernon has received many grants since the CDBG program was created in 1974. The city has identified specific target areas in the city that have low and moderate income neighborhoods. We have offered home rehabilitation projects, home repair projects, home buyer assistance program and rental rehab program. Along with these private sector programs we have used CDBG funds combined with city funds for the improvement of sidewalks, curbs and streets, stormwater drainage, and public handicap restrooms all located in the target areas. The CDBG program is a prime example of how a private-public partnership can improve low and moderate income segments of the community. Citizens of all ages who are in compliance with the income guidelines can fix up their houses and have input on the general improvement of their neighborhood.

The City of Mount Vernon also participated in three downtown revitalization programs. Like most cities - both large and small - our central business district had been impacted by the strip malls being located in the parameter of the city. "Mom and Pop" businesses that we knew as we grew up disappeared because of their inability to compete with the large merchandisers; however, many of these small businesses were able to make the transitions to meet the needs and demands of today's consumer. The downtown revitalization program allowed both the land owner and the tenant to fix up their store fronts, the interior and in some cases the roofs of their downtown buildings. This enabled the entire central business district to take on a new look. It energized the downtown area. The private public partnership was received with a great deal of enthusiasm in the Central Business District. In the last funded project the City of Mount Vernon did a complete rehab of the streetscape; new sidewalks, crosswalks, flowerbeds, street lighting, and storm drainage all added to make a more attractive downtown area. This would not have been possible without the support of the CDBG Downtown Revitalization Programs.

We have also been the recipient of the CDBG Competitive Grants. In the north end of our city we were able to go in, improve the storm drainage and put in a sidewalk that allowed the residents of several apartments catering to low and moderate income residents walk more safely from their apartments to the community swimming pool/playground and to a shopping area. Prior to the construction project the pavement was narrow, there was a large deep ditch on one side often times making it necessary for pedestrians to jump into the ditch to avoid being hit by a car. The construction of the drainage, the new sidewalks and crosswalks has made this area a much more safe area

for children and adults alike. We have recently been awarded another competitive grant that will be used in the west side of our city to improve streets and gutters, stormwater drainage, and to improve handicap access at Riverside Park. All these projects have had a positive impact on our city for over 30 years. As you can see a 27 percent decrease in funding which we believe is only the beginning of a plan that will have a negative impact on our ability to rehabilitate the low and moderate neighborhoods in our city.

Over the years, I have talked with senior citizens living primarily on Social Security that were able to procure a new roof with the CDBG helping hand enabling them to live additional years in a safe dry home. I have also talked to people who lived in substandard housing with faulty septic tanks that were able to connect to central sewer as part of their rehab program. I have talked to young and old people alike who lived in areas of the city that were built before storm sewers were the responsibility of developers. After every rainstorm, the area around their house, their driveways, their sidewalks (if they had them) were all submerged for several hours or even days until the water would evaporate. Storm sewers made the water disappear and improve the housing stock in these areas.

In conclusion, I believe the continuation of a fully funded community development block program is necessary to maintain small businesses, assist seniors in staying in their homes longer, assist young people who have limited income to rehab older homes, to improve property values, make roadways and sidewalks safer in target neighborhoods. Also, the improvement for handicap accessibility in public parks and restrooms have

all had a very positive impact on the City of Mount Vernon and surrounding area.

As Mayor, I am honored to be able to submit this testimony, and I regret that I was scheduled to be out of state this week; however, Safety-Service Director, David Glass has been with the city for over 27 years, and I am confident that this testimony was given a proper presentation.

RKM/jrb