

Detroit program awards \$2.5M in grants to 35 community groups

Mark Hicks Sarah Rahal

The Detroit News

Detroit's Housing & Revitalization Department has awarded nearly \$2.5 million in grants to 35 community groups to boost nonprofits and neighborhood service programs across the city, officials announced Monday.

The grants were given through the Neighborhood Opportunity Fund, which launched in 1976 and is part of the city's Community Development Block Grant program. It funds public services aimed at boosting the quality of life for low- and moderate-income residents in the city.

The \$2.5 million comes from the projected \$33.8 million in Community Development Block Grant funds the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development allocated to Detroit in the 2022-23 fiscal year, officials said Monday.

"Our goal through this program is to support the organizations that help support Detroit on a daily basis, offering important programs and services on which so many Detroiters rely," said Julie Schneider, director of the city Housing & Revitalization Department.

Grants are awarded in five categories: education, seniors, recreation, health and public safety.



The newest recipients include:

- Accounting Aid Society, \$88,750, for free tax preparation and counseling assistance for low- and moderate-income Detroiters and financial management education
- Cass Community Social Services, \$62,250 for funding to train unemployed and underemployed adults
- Clark Park Coalition, \$72,250 for summer youth recreation programs, winter hockey and youth employment
- Greening of Detroit, \$67,250 for a job-training program
- Jefferson East Inc., \$72,250 to increase security and reduce crime along the Jefferson corridor, support survivors of domestic violence
- Latin Americans for Social and Economic Development, \$72,250 for transportation, food assistance, wellness and other services for seniors
- Mercy Education Project, \$77,250 for providing educational opportunities and life skills for at-risk girls and women in southwest Detroit
- Siena Literacy Center, \$67,250 for adult literacy, digital literacy, workforce training, skill development
- Teen Hype Youth Development, \$77,250 for peer education through performing arts programs in dance, theater, music and photography
- World Medical Relief, \$72,250 for providing prescriptions to Detroiters without insurance or financial resources

"These are outstanding nonprofits and community organizations that provide important services across our city," said Mayor Mike Duggan. "... Between the Neighborhood Opportunity Fund and the upcoming Neighborhood Beautification Fund, we are providing more resources than ever to help Detroiters strengthen and beautify their community."

Anthony Benavides, director of the Clark Park Coalition, told The Detroit News that the funding will help meet the nonprofits growing needs this year.

The Coalition provides recreational, educational and social skills programming to youth and families at the southwest Detroit park. The space spent the last year as a vaccination site during the COVID-19 pandemic but when its traditional hockey season approached in December, Benavides thought they'd only have 40 kids enrolled until 150 showed up the first day.



"We're grateful and honored for the funding that will help in many ways with year-round recreation including co-ed softball, baseball programs and our costly winter hockey program," said Benavides, adding the coalition spends \$20,000 or more on just the hockey program annually. "We outfit 150 kids head-to-toe and have to search out indoor ice because our competitors are already practicing by September before we play in December so this will help us even out the playing field."

Alicia Elster, development director of Cass Community Social Services, said the funding is essential to fund their green jobs training program.

"Through the program, underemployed Detroiters are trained in solar paneling installation, training in recycling and reusing. Specifically, Detroiters are repurposing tires scattered across the city into practical things we sell including indoor mats," Elster said. "We're preparing folks for jobs of the future."

Grant applications are reviewed by the housing and revitalization department, which makes recommendations to the City Council on which proposals to award funding, officials said.

The next application process for Neighborhood Opportunity Fund funding starts in September.

"Just as the city relies on our community partners to help make a better Detroit for everyone, HRD stands by to help those partners in need of funding," said Tamra Fountaine Hardy, director of HRD's Neighborhood Services Division. "HRD stands ready to help these organizations to successfully apply for funding for the programs that help Detroiters be more successful themselves."

The announcement coincides with Duggan's administration working to upgrade recreational opportunities and neighborhoods.

This month, city officials announced a dozen recreation centers are slated for renovations, expansions and reopenings with total spending of \$45 million. The spending includes \$30 million from the city's share of American Rescue Plan Act funds, \$10 million in city bond funds and \$5 million from businessman and entrepreneur Roger Penske.

Duggan discussed the improvements during his annual State of the City address and has said his major spending priorities include removing blight, neighborhood improvements and beautification.

mhicks@detroitnews.com

srahal@detroitnews.com