

Grant money drying up for Lynn projects

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By Thor Jourgensen/The Daily Item

The city's Community Development director said federal money to pay for programs ranging from arts and youth activities to sidewalks and new trees dropped almost 20 percent over the last four years.

Community block grants — a decades-old source of federal tax dollars for local communities — brought \$2.7 million into Lynn in the spending year that began on July 1, 2010. But that sum has steadily declined to \$2.2 million, with a similar amount likely to be received by the city next year, said James Marsh.

Even with federal dollar declines, Marsh said Community Development has drafted a budget to provide money to 25 local programs, and to pay for nuts and bolts projects and business development programs in the city.

“We have to spread the pain around,” he said Thursday.

Block grant money helps pay for a variety of specific local programs set up to help Lynn residents, including the Council on Aging meals program, adult language education programs run by Operation Bootstrap, family support groups, and a college application project.

Grant amounts awarded to these projects and others range from \$1,400 to \$49,000, according to Community Development's draft budget.

Marsh said bigger projects include money matched with other tax dollars to pay for shade tree plantings across the city, antique lighting installations on local streets, and sidewalk replacements. “There has been more of a focus on infrastructure in the last few years,” Marsh said. He said Community Development is spending money on downtown sidewalks bordering two new businesses opening this fall on Sutton and Liberty streets.

D'Amici's Bakery and Rossetti's, an Italian restaurant opening in the same Sutton Street building as D'Amici's, received \$400,000 in loans from the city Economic Development and Industrial Corporation and tax incremental financing.

“We actively recruited both companies,” said EDIC Director James Cowdell.

Marsh said park improvement projects, including McManus Field's major renovation, will combine block grant money with state parks money.

“We've been very successful in matching state money for parks with block grants,” he said.

An 18-member citizens advisory board will rank a new round of block grant funding proposals early next year prior to a March public hearing on block grant spending. Marsh and the sitting mayor — incumbent Judith Flanagan Kennedy or Council President Timothy Phelan — will meet in mid-2014 to prioritize spending even as federal officials notify the city how much block grant money it will receive.

“Final numbers aren't in yet — we'll probably be level funded,” Marsh said.

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