

Transcript

***On West Gray*, Episode 23: The Community Development Block Grant Program w/Lisa Krieg**

Runtime: 24 minutes 54 Seconds

Tiffany Vrska 0:16

What's up, everybody? Welcome to On West Gray, the monthly podcast for all things local government in the city of Norman. I'm your host Tiffany Vrska chief communications officer for the city of Norman, and we appreciate you tuning in. Today in the studio with us. We have Lisa Krieg, CDBG, grants manager at the city of Norman. Lisa wears many, many hats. And he's here to talk with us today about some recent projects that she has going on for the community. Lisa, welcome to the show.

Lisa Krieg 0:44

Thank you for having me. It's a pleasure. I've been listening to these for quite some time. And I was just wondering when my number was coming up.

Tiffany Vrska 0:51

All right, well, it's your lucky day. Bryce and I are so happy to have you in the studio. Thank you. So CDBG, or the Community Development Block Grant Program, trying to say that a little slow so I don't stumble on my words here. It's a federal program of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development that supports development activities at a local level, to building strong and resilient communities, which is an absolute mouthful. So can you break down for us what that is and what you do in your capacity day to day and serving Norman residents, certainly CDBG is part of the government alphabet soup.

Lisa Krieg 1:32

It couples with the home HOA MA program. The city receives both of those funds by entitlement once Congress passes a budget, very large formula, we get letters saying how much money. But the beauty of the CDBG program is that it is entirely citizen driven. We have a citizen oversight committee made up of people that live within the neighborhoods, we work as well as at large and we meet for about six months of the year, talking about improvements that need to be made. Things that would be nice. Of course, we can't always do all of those. But the really interesting piece is is you get to know the citizens. And you know, like this morning or every Friday morning, there's a coffee group that meets and so I meet with them and hear what their issues are within the neighborhoods. But what that also does is it gives it gives the people in these neighborhoods a conduit to one person in the city they can call. And it's not that we can fix everything, but we can usually track down who they need to talk to, and then refer them to that person. So we were talking about on street parking this morning. Obviously CDBG program

doesn't have anything to do. But we were able to get them to the right person to where they could find out what needed to be. And it's it's solving the small problems that these neighbors have that seem relatively small in the whole scheme of 130,000 people in the city of Norman, but it is a huge issue for them. And a lot of times people will call not really knowing what the question is. And so they end up getting bounced around to lots of departments while we're trying to figure it out what it is. So the CDBG program is great in that way. The other thing is is because we have that conduit, there are a lot of things that come up that we cannot address with the program. But it gives that toehold into the city to where they can be addressed in the overall budget process. Such as for years over on Miller and Peters the curbs were deteriorated. Lots of traffic up and down that street. large trucks coming in and out as well as the street had been overlaid time and time again, that the curbs were actually about an inch tall, until when it would rain. There was stormwater issues brought up year after year within the the process of meeting with the neighborhood's obviously, the scope of that was much larger than what we could do. But we were able to get the information to the council member which was councilmember Hall at the time, and was able to get that project within the city budget. That never would have happened if it would have just been one person calling over and over and over. But collectively working with these neighborhoods, it helps to give them more of a voice in the things that impact them in their daily lives.

Tiffany Vrska 4:30

So are there neighborhoods of focus that you work with or is it clear across the city or how does how does that work?

Lisa Krieg 4:38

It is we do some of our programs are city wide such as our housing rehabilitation program, because that is tied to the actual income of the owner occupant. And so that program we can do within the city limits in Norman, the neighborhood specific stuff we have what's called a target area and based on census data, it is a A neighborhood a census block group, whereas 51% of the households have an income of 80% or less median income. HUD does the calculation for us. Primarily, there are five neighborhoods in the core that have historically been our target area, we are pivoting into what is called a strong Neighborhoods Initiative to where we're really going to focus on three of those neighborhoods. Lots of neighborhood organization, as well as working on very, very small projects. But again, that make a huge impact to the people that live in those neighborhoods, each of them have a small neighborhood park. And having just gone through the budget process. You see the list of capital projects? Well, these are, these are 50. By 140. Parks, they they serve the neighborhood, they usually do not even have a parking lot. And they're relatively low down on the whole city priority because there are so many of them. But with the block grant program, we're able to meet with the neighbors and find out what their wants, needs and desires are for these parks. For instance, McGeorge Park, they wanted to be able to take some of the green space that they had, and have a pollinator garden that the neighborhood would maintain. Very excited about that. We got our bids back yesterday. And so that's going to be going forward, that neighborhood is just beyond themselves, with excitement that they you know, they and you know, this is this is original town side is the original town side of Norman. So it's the oldest neighborhood that we have, which it's having some a little bit of a revitalization, a lot of younger people

have moved in there. And they're really wanting to do things together as a neighborhood. And so in addition to the pollinator garden, we're going to put some other adult oriented equipment in there. It's got a really nice play set for the kids but they really want some more adult activities for the park.

Tiffany Vrska 7:00

And a lot of the neighborhoods correct me if I'm wrong, but you know, they these older the downsides and what have you, they may not have their own HOA so it's almost like they're creating or operating in that capacity to have those beautification project upgrades, which is really cool.

Lisa Krieg 7:18

Right? You know, we had also stocking which is a neighborhood just north of city hall here formally organized last year's with a voluntary neighborhood association. That's the first one that we have done in years and years and years. Original townside is meeting next week to vote on theirs. Their bylaws though they have filed with Secretary of State become official and elect officers and all of that, first courthouses right behind them. They're working on that also.

Tiffany Vrska 7:45

So you get to have a huge hand and kind of guiding that process. And right, the organization of that, yeah,

Lisa Krieg 7:51

working with neighborhood alliance that the city has a contract with, we make sure that their bylaws are doing what they need to do, and that they understand what it means to be a voluntary neighborhood organization, as well as they understand the benefits of it in that that. Now they have this collective voice of a couple 100 People that live in this neighborhood that can then speak out on issues or support issues as as they come up.

Tiffany Vrska 8:19

Oh, that is so awesome. So how long have you been with the city of Norman and have you always been in your current position?

Lisa Krieg 8:26

So next month, July 5, I wrap up 40 years with the city of Norman Congratulation. Thank you. Thank you. I started in 1984. With a freshly minted architecture degree I did not know what to do with. It was not a

bustling economic time and Oklahoma pin square bank had just failed the oil boom was gone bust. Needless to say, there were no architecture jobs. There was a position a friend of mine told me about here is a housing rehabilitation specialist. Writing construction specification, supervising small projects on owner occupied homes. And so I thought, well, I'll do that for a few years, then I'll go get a real job. And so I did that for 15 years. Loved it. We still have that program. I spent lots of time sitting in people's kitchens and dining rooms sipping on weak iced tea talking about their houses, here and about all their kids and grandkids. We, you know, we had several people that each year at Christmas, they call us up and tell us to come by that they'd made cookies for us. And oh, why you're here. Can you rehang my shower curtain? Lots of that but Keith patella that worked with me who's retired now. We really enjoyed it. You know, it was unique in that the CDBG program by right can work on private property. Unlike the city of Norman with our capital funds. You So you really spent a lot of time getting to know these people. Some of the same people still call for occasional Assistance Program has evolved over the years, I did that for about 15 years, then I was promoted into the, what they call the grants planner, that I learned how to do the environmental reviews, the applications, kind of the paperwork part of it. And then after 15 years of that I was promoted into this position when when Linda price retired. And so I've had the benefit of great people to mentor me throughout throughout my career here, not just in the block grant program, but the planning department and, you know, the city staff as a whole.

Tiffany Vrska 10:43

So I was not lying when I said that you have worn and are still wearing many hats.

Lisa Krieg 10:50

You know, and it's funny that just the amount of, you know, historic stuff that floats around in the back of your head and stuff that you may not have been involved with. But you remember when it happened? And so you're like, oh, yeah, so? No,

Tiffany Vrska 11:05

that's awesome. So what would you say is the the most interesting part about your job? Oh, the variety.

Lisa Krieg 11:14

You know, such as this morning, I met with neighborhood people. Every Friday morning, we have coffee and I just listened to him. I will meet with bankers talking about potential homebuyer programs. Lots of just working with other departments, you know, the AME process is going on right now. Which is, is amazing. Having gone through this multiple times. This is this is a huge endeavor for the city. Yes.

Tiffany Vrska 11:44

And our listeners, that's our comprehensive planning. Yes, that's ongoing. Yeah,

Lisa Krieg 11:48

the AME area infrastructure master planning process, that is not just the land use, it's all of these other plans that have always been there, but they've never really talked to each other. And so now, for once this will be a true comprehensive plan. What I'm really excited about as the housing plan that's coming out of that we have we have never had a strategic housing plan. And so it's letting us take a good look at the housing opportunities within the city where the gaps are, where the overlaps are, where it's just plain missing in some areas, and trying to come up with a strategy that even though the city itself really doesn't influence this, we can have policies that will allow for housing development across all income spectrums. I in no way fault, a developer for building a \$500,000, custom home. But we need to figure out a way that we can get more of affordable or workforce affordability type housing within this community to support everybody within the community. Right?

Tiffany Vrska 13:04

Absolutely. And you, you commented on something there when you're talking about folks talking to each other and doing the coffee and working with different departments that we discuss a lot of times here in our communications office. And I think that's community relations. And it's so hard to measure that, you know, in comparison to some other divisions, they can say we laid this many miles of concrete or we picked up tons of trash. And you can kind of quantify that. But with some of what you and I do, there's not a way to really quantify the value. How important would you say that community relations is in local government?

Lisa Krieg 13:48

Oh, very important, very important, because it is the most tangible form of government, to the people that live within the community, it's approachable, should be approachable. And I think that the community relations part really gives people that level of comfort of being able to approach not just staff but a council member, or the mayor or the manager about an issue that they may be having.

Tiffany Vrska 14:17

Yes, and just works to build transparency and trust and you know, put faces to names. I love that part about it. So I love that we share that. So what projects have you been working on recently, we've had a lot of traction on certain affordable housing projects. Like can you tell us a little bit about that?

Lisa Krieg 14:37

You bet I'd be more than happy to it was hard keeping it a secret. I'll tell you that much. Crimson flat is a development that is going to be constructed at the corner of Oakerson emhoff. About a year ago the city purchased the parcel. Currently it's being prepped for for construction. We worked with the council I Say we it was primarily Anthony from the assistant city attorney's office and I got the got the call from the manager, that council had set aside substantial sum of money from the ARPA award to be put towards affordable housing, we pursued a couple of different things that really didn't pan out. And then we decided that let's just really try to leverage these funds instead of just spinning them. So we worked with a consulting firm out of Oklahoma City to bruleur and Associates to help us package an RFP to attract a tax credit developer. And so using that, I think it's about five and a half million dollars. As leverage, we were able to do an RFP, we had six proposals, we were completely shocked. We selected Gorman property management as the applicant, they were very sensitive to the site in that it abuts a neighborhood. And so they had very minimal impact to that neighborhood. As part of the process, we went ahead and rezone the property, and throughout that we rezone it as affordable housing. And so I'm proud to say that we went through pre Development Planning Commission, as well as City Council with no protest. And I think that is because that we were very transparent with what we were doing, we met with the neighborhood and explained what was going on. It helped that Linda price lives in that neighborhood. And so she understand and was able to talk to her neighbors about that. And it just shows that if if you're if you're very transparent in you're very detailed on what you're going to do, it's not always going to come out in opposition to that. So we were awarded 14 and a half million dollars of tax credit funding, the money that the city is utilizing is being done as a low interest loan to the developer as gap financing, it will come back to the city over a period of 10 years. And we are working currently with council to establish an affordable housing trust fund. So when those funds come back in, we can do this again. That's awesome.

Tiffany Vrska 17:16

And for those who may not be familiar, I think there may be some confusion out there, can you speak further to what affordable housing is and what is not?

Lisa Krieg 17:26

Okay. I say affordable housing has two definitions. There's the capital A and the capital H affordable housing, which means that it receives some sort of a government regulation or subsidy in that the housing is developed for households up to 80% income, that they will not be paying one 30% of their income towards housing. So that's a lot of numbers. But and that is either done with a development subsidy to the developer to bring the price of development down, or subsidy to the tenants such as Section eight. And sometimes it's both in so this project will be the first whereas a subsidy is being made to the developer by the low interest loan from the city and the tax credits. There is no rental assistance really associated with a low income housing tax credit project is just the rents are affordable, they can accept section eight, actually, they must accept section eight, which is the other big piece of this, that as a lie tech project, they're required to accept section eight if someone has a voucher, the little a little h is the affordable housing that most of the public is looking at in that it needs to be affordable to what your income is. And so everybody has that that different threshold. You know, the goal depending on if it's a

mortgage, they're looking at about 40% that everybody has to be comfortable with what they're paying for their housing cost. And obviously, different incomes have different levels of comfortableness. Last week, the manager had asked me to go to a conference in Dallas on housing and they had a new term I was not familiar with. We always talk affordable housing workforce housing market rate housing. Well, they have added what they're calling attainable housing, and that is workforce housing in that it's for households that are between 80 and 120%. And a lot of times that would require a because things are just so dang expensive these days would require some sort of a subsidy to the developer to bring that development cost down to where they can afford to rent it or sell it at that attainable price range but it really does not have an ongoing subsidy. Got you

Tiffany Vrska 19:55

and affordable housing attainable housing workforce housing in no wave this is very different from what a shelter would be correct?

Lisa Krieg 20:03

Definitely, definitely, you know, a shelter is is a, a very it's a facility that's very transient in nature, you know, pretty much falls under the zoning regulation of like a hotel, that it could be one night, it could be five nights. And then of course, there's all kinds of different levels of shelters that can be provided low barrier, like we have a little higher barrier. And then there were the even the highest barrier shelters that that some communities have understood.

Tiffany Vrska 20:34

So what would you most like people to know about planning and community development or what you do in general,

Lisa Krieg 20:46

everyday is a new day. But you know, I am a firm follower of Malcolm Gladwell when he talks about, you know, that 10,000 hour threshold, that once you have been doing a job for 10,000 hours, that's when you really realize that you know what you're doing. I've been very blessed. As I said, to have great people that I've worked with throughout these years, of course, I hit 10,000 hours years ago. But every day, I'm amazed at the dedicated group of people that work for the city. I know that a lot of people just kind of snub their nose at us. But it's interesting, because everybody here comes in every day to do the best that they can do and love this community and want to make it better. So and you know, the support that the CDBG program, my staff and myself that that we have received from the planning department, Jane Hudson planning director is amazing to work with Darryl, you know, the ideas that he comes up with are amazing. And, you know, they're exciting to run with. And so, you know, like I said, Every day is a new day, and it never gets boring around here. It does

Tiffany Vrska 22:03

not and to your point, when you said, you know, folks are coming in every day, just trying to do the best that they can to serve Norman, I have to share with you. So our Citizens Academy will be starting again, the 2024 program next month. And to illustrate what you said, I just love when we put this program on, because all of the departments, you know, each week, the academy participants, they meet with a different department in the departments do not fall short of making it a competition. I mean, it's just, oh, they brought cookies, or I'm gonna bring cake for them. And they did this or I'm going to do that. And it's just, it's fun. And they're volunteering, and in many ways, and in many capacities, like they don't have to be here from that 530 To 735 30 to 830. But they all want to come, every single person in this division or department will show up and they want to be a part of this process. And they want to engage with folks, and I've just been blown away by that. Yeah.

Lisa Krieg 23:00

And being on the side of the department that it pulls this stuff together. It's amazing what we learn about ourselves. You know, planning has multiple divisions that do lots of different things in this this last year. I was like, Oh, I forgot about that.

Tiffany Vrska 23:16

Yes, it's a really good refresher.

Lisa Krieg 23:18

I, you know, I almost think that we need to have a Citizens Academy, but the employees need to show up. And we just kind of do the dog and pony show for each other.

Tiffany Vrska 23:29

Well, is there anything else Lisa, that you would like to add or share with our listeners?

Lisa Krieg 23:32

Not really, it's it's been a pleasure being here. And it's exciting to listen to these things and and the level of information that you've brought up with this department. With the citizens being able to see everything that's going on? I think it's it's raised that veil, you know, I think a lot of people just kind of go over the city, but they don't really understand that that were part of them. Absolutely. 100%

Tiffany Vrska 24:00

Oh, thank you so much. And thank you for joining us this morning. Questions or commentary about On West Gray can be sent into public affairs at [Norman ok.gov](https://norman.ok.gov). Shouts to our producer and editor Mr. Bryce Holland of the city of Norman communications office visit [Norman ok.gov/norman-news](https://norman.ok.gov/norman-news) To enroll in email notifications for city PSAs traffic advisories and more. Until next time, stay engaged. Stay informed and always remember to cast your ballot. I'm Tiffany Vrska. Thank you for joining us On West Gray

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