

ECONOMIC Developments

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GSA COMMITTED TO GOOD NEIGHBOR PROGRAM: NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR BIDS

The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) has begun putting flesh on its Good Neighbor program. The program is a manifestation of the agency's renewed commitment to help in the revitalization of urban areas through, for example, greater participation in Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). The program was first announced last fall, simultaneous with the agency's signing of memoranda of understanding with the National Council for Urban Economic Development and the International Downtown Association. GSA committed to participating more fully in the economic life of communities in which government offices are located.

The agency says it perceives federal properties as community building blocks. Under the program, GSA will participate in community efforts to make better neighborhoods. Types of activities will include: providing ground floor retail, developing its plazas and public spaces, subleasing its facilities and hosting special events.

"A better neighborhood benefits not just the federal workers in its buildings, but the people who live and work in the community," said Robert Peck, Commissioner of Public Building Services with the program.

"Through these efforts, we are building partnerships with local communities to bring out the best instincts in government," said GSA Acting Administrator David J. Barram.

GSA's Commitment

GSA wants to participate fully with community revitalization initiatives. Many of its properties are located in special districts, such as BIDs, and the agency plans to forge a new partnership with downtowns by signing memoranda of understanding to formalize its partnering. One thing the agency can do is contract directly with such districts to purchase necessary services, such as lighting and sidewalk cleaning.

Agency administrators are seeking ongoing ties to a community's overall planning strategy and want to contribute to the process. They not only plan to attend community meetings but will invite community leaders to participate in the agency's planning process, share specific project information and involve themselves in redevelopment efforts such as those in Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities.

GSA can comply with Executive Orders and legislative mandates through the Good Neighbor program. It will address concerns about location, access, parking, transportation, building security, safety issues, historic integrity and environmental impacts.

Ultimately, GSA will look to its field offices and on-site property managers to develop its building activities and work directly with communities. To assist them, GSA will conduct a complete review of its current policies.

Good Neighbors

"GSA will work with the leaders of our cities in any and every way feasible, in a new and constructive partnership," said Barram. "We can use the resources of GSA to leverage local resources and become really 'good neighbors'."

Barram stresses that GSA can contract directly with special districts to purchase services, but that in order to execute the agreement, the services must be fairly priced and directly benefit the mission of GSA's customers or enhance its facility assets.

Under the Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act of 1976, the agency can provide free or at-cost space for cultural, recreational or educational uses. GSA already provides many of these types of services.

In Chicago, GSA hosts a farmer's market twice a week in its federal plaza. In Dallas, it provides space to neighborhood "Ambassadors" who act as greeters and watchdogs for the community. Through its Public Buildings Heritage Program, many GSA regions are setting up preservation exhibits in its landmark buildings.

"Our buildings are public buildings, a vital part of our nation's heritage and belong to our communities," said Peck. "We want to open them up and invite people in. Many of our buildings are already local landmarks and were built to spur economic development. Our facilities can help revitalize our neighborhoods where that is needed."

GSA also subleases its facilities and, through its property disposal efforts, provides surplus federal properties for public use. Many of those properties, totaling over \$280 million in the last five years, are located in Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities.

Executive Orders

The Good Neighbor program is intended to support Executive Orders 12072 and 13006 that require federal agencies to give first consideration to locating into central business areas and using historic buildings and districts within those areas.

Furthermore, E.O. 12072 requires agencies to locate first in Central Business Areas and similar adjacent regions. In the recent past, there has been some inconsistency in locational decisions, particularly with respect to how government agencies have applied the order. This is one important concern that GSA is specifically attempting to redress through its Good Neighbor program.

Over the last six months, Barram has been working with other federal agencies, through the President's Management Council, to get them to address locational decisions. According to GSA, the agencies are working together to provide more consistent mission requirements and to carry out locational policies.

To facilitate this, GSA is instituting changes to more effectively apply E.O. 12072. Through its planning efforts, the agency will work with city groups earlier and more directly. The agency will also work directly with

cities to provide services and incentives to make their locations more attractive to federal employees. It assures that it will also help other agencies to work directly with cities.

E.O. 13006 requires federal agencies to locate first in historic buildings and districts within central business areas. Agencies are compelled to do a complete review of the policies and standards under which they consider when and how to rehabilitate their own buildings, or when they lease or purchase other historic structures.

"Under E.O. 13006, GSA intends to review its standards, assess its historic properties and actively search for opportunities to locate in and utilize historic resources," said Peck. "It will be more aggressive about seeking space and creative about finding uses for historically, architecturally and culturally significant buildings, especially those that are not part of its owned inventory."

Outreach to CUED

GSA is seeking help from CUED members. The agency wants to set up a network of CUED contacts to work with its field offices around the country. Let GSA know who you are, where you are located, if your community has a special district that includes federal properties, or if your community has a project or activity in which the agency can participate. GSA is also interested in knowing if you are already working with the agency on a local community project.

Contact Hillary Levitt, special assistant to the commissioner, at (202) 501-1881, or e-mail hillarylevitt@gsa.gov, to join the network and share project ideas. GSA will put you into direct contact with its local representatives.

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