

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



City of Duluth - Fire Department

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DATE: 4/15/2022

SUBJECT: Duluth selected as one of eight communities to receive blight reduction grant

BY: Kate Van Daele, Public Information Officer

NATURE OF INCIDENT:

CASE NO.:

INCIDENT DATE:

INCIDENT TIME:

INCIDENT LOCATION:

Duluth selected as one of eight communities to receive blight reduction grant

[Duluth, MN] The City of Duluth was recently selected as one of eight communities across the country to receive a two-year blight reduction grant. The grant is a program called Love Your Block, which brings together city leaders and the community to revitalize neighborhoods one block at a time.

The Love Your Block grant focuses on external funds and community resources to address residents' concerns about abandoned waste, illegal dumping, and poorly maintained homes and infrastructure. Funding is provided by Cities of Service, which is a part of Johns Hopkins University, with funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies. The two-year grant allows the City to hire a fellow position and one AmeriCorps VISTA member to coordinate the program and provides \$40,000 in mini-grants for a total of \$100,000. The Duluth Fire Department's Life Safety division will administer the grant, which responds to blight complaints.

Overall, the grant will give the Life Safety division more capacity to respond to blight complaints while working with community members and organizations to address blight concerns in neighborhoods across the City. In 2020, 78% of the blight complaints submitted to the City's Department of Life Safety were related to abandoned waste and trash. The remaining complaints pertain to unmaintained homes and yards. Life Safety budgets approximately \$22,000 to support the clean-up of abandoned waste such as furniture and appliances through a private hauler and the staff time to assess and address the clean-up need.

Representatives from the Duluth Fire Department expect to launch mini-grants in May of 2022 that residents can apply for to address blight in the Lincoln Park and Central Hillside neighborhoods. Residents within those neighborhoods can apply for up to \$1,500 to create an event or activity to remove blight, clean up trash and vegetation, improve bus stops, remove graffiti, among other activities to strengthen neighborhoods. The application to apply will be located at <https://duluthmn.gov/love-your-block/love-your-block-mini-grants/>.

"Residents know their neighborhoods. They know what is happening and have ideas on how places and spaces could be improved," Deputy Chief of Life Safety Jon Otis said. "To have funds that can empower residents to deal with blight on their block, or a block that needs help is something that we are really looking forward to. Duluthians act when called upon, and these resources matched with volunteers we think will make an impact in neighborhoods across Duluth."

Each year the City of Duluth Planning and Development Department conducts a [Community Needs Assessment](#). This assessment prioritizes the use of Housing and Urban Development funds. In 2021, twenty percent of community member respondents identified "addressing blight" as a top priority for using HUD funds. Residents noted that blight causes safety and health hazards, reduces investment in neighborhoods, and is a factor in the amount of quality, affordable housing available.

"Our Department receives blight complaints all the time," Otis said. "We know that blight removal in the form of illegal dumping is something that Duluthians really care about. This grant opportunity is crucial in providing us with a new tool in our toolbox to address these complaints and illegal behavior."

In the first year, the Love Your Block Fellow and AmeriCorps Vista will use grant funds to:

- Visit with community members and organizations to learn about areas of concern,
- Conduct clean-up and beautification events,
- Strengthen communication between residents and City of Duluth staff, -- identify barriers to safe, affordable, and effective waste disposal,
- Launch the first three rounds of the mini-grants, and,

- Collaborate to better align City resources with resident needs related to waste removal, home repairs, and built infrastructure.

Since 2009, Cities of Service has helped nearly 50 cities implement Love Your Block. More than 26,000 community members have revitalized over 3,500 community spaces, creating almost 750 art displays, cleaning 98,000 square feet of graffiti, removing 6 million pounds of trash, and much more.

To learn more about the Love Your Block grant please visit <https://duluthmn.gov/love-your-block/>.

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