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# Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) in Washington, D.C.

## THE ABCs OF CBAs FOR COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

A community benefits agreement (CBA) is a contract negotiated and signed between a community and a private developer, under which the developer agrees to provide benefits in exchange for the community's public support of a proposed development project.

## WHY SHOULD COMMUNITIES NEGOTIATE CBAs?

*CBAs are a tool for residents to play a leadership role in securing benefits for their community. The advantages on using CBAs may include the following:*

**CBAs are an opportunity for communities to have a prominent voice in the development process.** When creating a CBA, community members negotiate directly with private developers — rather than through local government — to focus on benefits that represent community priorities and interests.

**CBAs can secure resources to fund local programs and support long-term community goals.** Residents can use CBAs to direct private investment into programs that create affordable housing, youth scholarships, workforce development, and other community initiatives. CBAs can be particularly helpful in traditionally under-resourced communities that seek more community-centered development.

**CBAs can mitigate social, economic, and environmental impacts of new developments on surrounding communities.<sup>1</sup>** CBAs can be used to encourage developers to reduce displacement of residents, maintain affordable housing, and meet environmental standards and other goals.<sup>2</sup>

**CBAs can increase transparency and accountability between communities and developers.** A CBA that truly reflects local interests can give communities clarity about the benefits that developers promise to provide. In turn, developers have an opportunity to address community concerns early on — rather than after construction has begun — and garner community support and mitigate any opposition.

## WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF CBA BENEFITS?



### Housing

Increased affordable housing set-asides

Deeper affordability commitments



### Jobs

Internships and apprenticeship programs

Living wage and local hiring requirements



### Environment

Parks and other recreation space

Air quality monitoring

Traffic and noise reductions



### Local Development

Funding for business incubators

Below-market rate retail space

Business façade improvements

## HOW DO I KNOW IF A CBA IS RIGHT FOR MY COMMUNITY?

In Washington, D.C., CBAs are typically negotiated for large projects (e.g., Audi Field) or projects that require significant zoning variances (e.g., planned unit developments or PUDs). The best time to negotiate a CBA is after a developer has proposed a development, but before the project has received approval from the Zoning Commission. However, to maximize resident participation and leverage, community organizing should start well before a developer submits a project proposal. Residents should consult with their local Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners (ANCs), who hold “great weight” in local planning decisions, as well as their civic associations and other community representatives.<sup>3</sup>

## WHO CAN PARTICIPATE, AND HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

Any individual who may be impacted by a proposed development can participate in the CBA process. Community members may include homeowners and renters, business owners, non-profits, ANCs, other elected officials, among others. You can participate in the CBA process by:

- **Attending your community or ANC meetings** to learn about future development projects in your neighborhood
- **Organizing a local coalition to negotiate** a CBA around a planned development
- **Testifying at Zoning Commission hearings** or other public hearings about CBAs or proposed development in your community

## WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

In addition to the DC-specific CBA resources developed by the O’Neill Institute, many other national and local organizations have created CBA tools and guidance, including:

[Good Jobs First](#)

[PowerSwitch Action](#)

[Fair Shake Environmental Legal Services](#)

## WHAT DOES THE CBA PROCESS LOOK LIKE?

### Build a Coalition

Convene community stakeholders

Identify and assess local priorities

Choose community representatives

### Negotiate

Negotiate for specific and measurable commitments

Consult technical experts as needed

### Finalize Agreement

Sign CBA (community representatives and developers)

Incorporate CBA in zoning order, if appropriate

Implement, monitor, enforce



## WHAT ARE SOME LOCAL EXAMPLES?

Progression Place, Shaw (Wards 1 & 2)

Marriott Marquis Hotel, Shaw (Ward 2)

Broadcast, Tenleytown (Ward 3)

Riggs Park Place, Riggs Park (Ward 4)

Eckington Park, Eckington (Ward 5)

Audi Field, Southwest Waterfront (Ward 6)

Meadow Green Apts, Greenway (Ward 7)

Entertainment & Sports Arena, Congress Heights (Ward 8)

### ENDNOTES

- 1 Salkin & Levine, *Understanding CBAs*. UCLA J. Envtl. L. & Pol'y, 2008.
- 2 Juskus & Elia, *Long Time Coming*. Shelterforce, 2007.
- 3 D.C. Code § 1-309.10.