

City GA Policy #7 GA POLICY

City of Belfast Statement of policy on the Administration of General Assistance and financial assistance requests: Dated March 17, 2015

1. We want to treat every applicant with dignity and respect, and demonstrate a genuine interest in helping out; if we can. We want to be welcoming and helpful.
2. The State has rules as to how to administer the General Assistance Program and we follow the model General Assistance Ordinance drafted by MMA, subject to any independently authorized amendments the City formally adopts.
3. In every inquiry for assistance, a General Assistance Application will be filled out with the helpful assistance of a General Assistance Administrator.
4. We want to look at all factors; especially if children are involved and who may be impacted by the poor judgment of parents or other adults. If we must disqualify the adult then we still want to make sure that the kids are covered.
5. In every inquiry the General Assistance Administrator will read aloud the warning against willful written false statements which can disqualify an applicant for 120 days in the future. It will be made clear to applicants that the City's General Assistance Program must comply with State laws.
6. The rules of General Assistance often provide the General Assistant Administrator with some discretion. It is the policy of the City to exercise this discretion in favor of the applicant at all times.
7. After the Application has been filled out, the Administrator should go over it to make sure that we have a comprehensive understanding of the Applicant's entire situation, regardless of the nature of the specific request. If the applicant does not qualify for the specific type of request that they are making, but would be entitled to other benefits under the rules of GA, then they shall be so advised and given the opportunity to decide whether or not they wish to amend their application to include this other option.
8. The Applicant's responsibility to document and provide proof of their situation, their past actions, and their past available resources should always be applied with a view of reasonable accommodation. City staff will help applicants get the documentation they may need, including making phone calls on their behalf, including providing fax, mail, electronic mail, and photocopy services to help Applicants.
9. The City will do its best to help the Applicant fulfill their responsibilities to provide accurate, complete and current information. We understand that people who administer GA know more about the program than many applicants do, so we want to provide applicants with the broadest reasonable knowledge about how to properly apply for help. We should tell them that they need to apply for everything that they think they need.
10. To the best extent possible the City wants to consider a phone as a basic need and as an essential expense for job searches, medical support, calls to GA office, housing searches etc. If we decide that a cell phone is unnecessary we do not want to count the current months bill as an unneeded expense until such time as we help them replace their cell phone with a substitute phone (SNAP program "Safe Link")

11. We want to have transportation cost, associated with food shopping, job searches, and medical treatments considered as an essential expense and entered as zero (0) on line 4 on every application.
12. We want everyone who does not qualify for General Assistance to be evaluated for Emergency Assistance. If there is an emergency, then the higher benefit of either GA or Emergency Assistance should be authorized. If there is not an emergency, then the file narrative should explain why.
13. If applicants appear to be impaired for any reason; such as age, education, mental or emotional challenges, physical challenges, etc., then the General Assistance Administrator will make their best effort to locate someone such as a case worker, advocate, or other person or contact who may help the impaired person pursue any form of assistance they seek. Alternatively the General Assistance Administrator may perform this service by helping someone work through the paperwork, getting in contact with the right person on their behalf, and helping with forwarding documents to other entities that may be of potential assistance to an impaired person. This does not take away the Applicant's responsibility; it is helping them to fulfill it. If we have any question about whether or not what we are saying is sinking in, then we should always have the Applicant repeat back to us what we have said.
14. Money available to the Applicant is supposed to be spent on basic necessities, but reasonable allowances for a reasonably priced child's birthday present or similar expense should not be considered misspent on a first time applicant. We should explain any denial relating to misspent money in writing and explain verbally and in writing that any future occurrence of misspent money can cause future denial of benefits.
15. A first-time applicant or an applicant who has not been here in over a year is entitled to a little imperfection. We should demonstrate some leeway if they did not know or had forgotten all of the rules of GA.
16. Written warnings should be reviewed, delivered, and signed by the applicant on any issue that may preclude them from getting assistance in the future.
17. Family relationships and friendships have dynamics that are very complicated. While people do need to utilize their resources before getting GA, we should not be in the practice of assuming that other family members or friends can or will help unless we have special knowledge that they can or will help. Contacting that family member or friend to be sure is always required if we are going to hinge an eligibility decision on some assumption that the relative or friend can or will help.
18. A person may leave their job and still qualify if they had "just cause" to do so. If there are two plausible explanations as to why the job was vacated and one of them supports the applicant then the City wants to err on the side of the applicant.
19. Applicants who we have determined are ineligible because they have misspent their money still have a need. We are to help them pursue other reasonable forms of assistance.
20. The General Assistance Administrators shall make themselves familiar with all other public and private entities that offer financial assistance to those in need. The GA Administrator will offer to assist Applicants with accessing public and private entities that offer financial assistance to those in need. If GA funding will not meet the needs of the Applicant, then the GA Administrator

shall do all they reasonably can to help the applicant to secure assistance to meet those needs elsewhere.

21. The City wants to consider the whole of the Applicant's situation. We should be looking to provide responsive strategies or proposals with either GA or other outside programs that may help to limit the Applicant's future needs or make it unnecessary for the applicant to continue to experience the same shortfall in the future and possibly need to come back.
22. We need to help the applicant reach out to non GA sources such as Maine State Housing, LIHEAP, TANF, Salvation Army, Ministerium, Soup Kitchen' etc. The Ministerium is not a formal non-profit, and we should not treat it as a primary resource like other agencies, non-profits or government programs. It should be treated as a secondary resource when all else fails. We must have clear knowledge of what other resources are out there and regularly network with these groups to best understand how they operate; we can then better advise applicants accordingly.
23. If GA can't help and we are aware of other resources that may be helpful to the applicant then we shall provide the referral information to the applicant and help them understand why these referrals may be useful. We will assist them with their efforts to apply for them, including helping them to find transportation, if needed.

April 7th, 2015

Councilor Hurley, seconded by Councilor Sanders, made a motion to accept the request from the Cemetery Superintendent for permission to go out to bid for a new truck. This motion was approved, 5-0.

N) Request from the Cemetery Superintendent to waive the bid process on a multi-year effort to clean and re-point the grave stones in Grove Cemetery.

Cemetery Superintendent Steve Boguen explained the request which will be a 3-4 year project and the different proposals that he received for the project, He along with the Trustees are recommending to use the services of Thomas Stevens of Newcastle in the amount of \$121,000, funds coming from the Cemetery Trust Funds.

Councilor Harkness, seconded by Councilor Arrison, made a motion to accept the request from the Cemetery Superintendent to waive the bid process on a multi-year effort to clean and re-point the grave stones in Grove Cemetery. This motion was approved, 5-0.

O) Request from the Planning Office to amend the award for reconstruction at the intersection of Route 1 and Route 141.

City Planner Wayne Marshall explained the request, noting that the original awarding of the bid to Farley & Sons is okay, the amendment is due to MDOT requesting an onsite inspector all the time. This means that they are requesting authorization to increase the amount for inspection for the project from \$10,000 to \$21,000 and to approve up to \$6,046 in City funds which will come from the Undesignated Fund Balance to cover inspection cost.

Councilor Arrison, seconded by Councilor Hurley, made a motion to increase the amount authorized for project inspection from \$10,000 to \$21,000, and approve up to \$6,046 in City funds to cover inspection costs, funds coming from the Undesignated Fund Balance and to retain the \$5,000 contingency. This motion was approved, 5-0.

~~P) Request from the City Manager for the Council to approve policies for the administration of the City's General Assistance Program.~~

City Manager Joseph Slocum discussed that these policies have been vetted by the City Attorney and since edited for grammatical errors, he is requesting that the City Council approve these policies to assist in the City Manager's management of the City's General Assistance Program.

Councilor Sanders, seconded by Councilor Mortier, made a motion to accept to approve policies for the administration of the City's General Assistance Program. This motion was approved, 5-0.