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SAINT PAUL - Summer youth employment, home improvements and a library expansion are some of the projects that will benefit from a $2.1 million community development block grant the City is pursuing though the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD.)

The money is part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. It will create up to 500 temporary and permanent jobs and further Invest Saint Paul projects that strengthen our historic neighborhoods and support residents in communities that have been both hampered by years of disinvestment and disproportionately affected by the recent housing crisis.

“This economy has hit urban centers especially hard - neighborhoods already affected by years of disinvestment. This money will help us provide both seasonal and permanent jobs, invest in recreation centers and libraries, and attract both commercial and housing investments that will strengthen our historic communities,” Mayor Chris Coleman said.

Among the projects the grant money would support:

- adding a computer lab at the West 7th Library to assist job seekers;
- expanding the Summer Youth Employment program to both increase the number of participants and provide year-round jobs;
- securing or demolishing vacant buildings which threaten public health and safety; and
- providing homeowners with information and incentives to make energy efficiency improvements to their homes.

In addition, the grant will help launch a new public-private partnership, an urban hydroponics farm on Rice Street that will create jobs and provide locally-grown produce to area grocery outlets. The hydroponics farm, alone, is expected to create 40 construction jobs and another 50 permanent jobs in the North End neighborhood.

In 2008, the City submitted its application for a community development block grant but was requested to amend its application to receive new money allocated through the Recovery Act. HUD is in the midst of a 45-day review process and the City hopes to gain approval to proceed with its proposed activities by mid-July.