

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

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2-26-02

DATE: FEBRUARY 20, 2002

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF A PLANNING PROCESS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TEEN CENTER

ISSUE: Consideration of a planning process for the development of a teen center for 9th through 12th graders (Councilwoman Woodson's request).

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

- (1) Request that the City Manager designate staff and up to four youth volunteers and up to three adults recruited from the community, together with a member of City Council designated by the Mayor, to form an ad hoc planning group to proceed with a feasibility study for a teen center which would be operated and primarily financed by a non-City entity. The group would determine the possible program elements, evaluate alternative operational models, evaluate possible locations, develop estimated capital and operating costs, and identify funding sources for such a center and private entities that may wish to operate the center, in partnership with the City;
- (2) Approve the transfer of \$50,000 designated in the FY 2002 contingent reserves account to a non-departmental teen center study account for the costs associated with the planning process, with any unexpended planning monies to be carried over as a possible one-time funding source for a portion of the teen center start-up costs; and
- (3) Request that staff report back to Council with the study as soon as possible, but no later than the first legislative meeting in June 2002.

BACKGROUND: On May 7, 2001, City Council approved \$50,000 in the FY 2002 budget, set aside in contingent reserves, for a feasibility study and possible start-up costs for a teen center for grades 9 through 12. In October, Councilwoman Woodson convened a small group of City staff and interested citizens to begin preliminary discussions about the feasibility of a teen center, building on suggestions and discussions Councilwoman Woodson had with students in the T.C. Williams band class last spring. In addition, in November, Councilwoman Woodson discussed the concept of a teen center with the Youth Policy Commission.

DISCUSSION: From the preliminary discussions to date, there is interest in exploring the feasibility of establishing a teen center for young people in grades 9 through 12. Several community groups have expressed an interest in being involved in the planning process, and the Alexandria City Public Schools have indicated their willingness to work with the teen center planning effort, including allowing a survey of the secondary school students to be conducted to gauge student interest in various program elements that may be offered at a teen center.

While some preliminary work has been done to begin a feasibility study for the teen center, we need to create a planning group to more fully address the program components, evaluate a location, develop a capital and estimated operating budget, and develop recommendations for the governance structure for a teen center. Throughout the planning process, it is important to have the active participation of youth, as well as representatives from the City staff and interested citizens. Upon Council approval of the establishment of an ad hoc planning group, staff will identify and recruit up to four youth volunteers in grades 9 through 12 and up to three adults to participate as members of the ad hoc group.

The first step in the planning process will be to finalize and administer a student survey to the 9th through 12th graders at Minnie Howard and T.C. Williams to gauge their interest in the use of a teen center, and the types of activities the youth would like to see available at the center. Once the short survey instrument is finalized, the intention is to seek the Alexandria City Schools approval to administer the survey briefly during a home room session.

The ad hoc teen center planning group will be charged with analyzing the survey data, and together with assistance from representatives from private industry and/or the Small Business Development Center, preparing a draft business plan for the center that will include estimated operating and capital costs; reviewing potential locations for the teen center¹; and making a recommendation for the governing board for the teen center (e.g., establishing a private, non-profit group; partnering with an existing non-profit organization; or partnering with an existing for-profit organization).

As part of the draft business plan for the teen center, the ad hoc planning group will be charged with identifying potential funding sources for the center, including fees or possible grant funding sources. It is important to note that on-going City funding for the operations of a teen center does not appear to be feasible at this time, and the ad hoc planning group will need to consider how the center can be self-supporting.

One tentative existing commercial site with good transportation access in the west end is under staff review at this time to determine if the site would meet building code requirements. If this site is suitable, the ad hoc planning group will be tasked with developing capital build-out costs for this site, and determining potential lease terms. In the event that this site does not prove suitable, the ad hoc planning group will be tasked with identifying other potential sites for evaluation.

The funding available in the City's FY 2002 budget will offset the costs associated with the development and distribution of a student survey, and the preliminary architectural and engineering work that will be necessary to develop a capital cost estimate for the teen center. Any unexpended monies are recommended to be available to offset a portion of the start-up costs (such as capital build-out), should a suitable site be identified and approved by City Council.

FISCAL IMPACT: The FY 2002 budget includes \$50,000 for a feasibility study of a teen center for youth in grades 9 through 12. There are no monies available for the on-going operations of such a center in the City's budget at this time.

STAFF:

Lori Godwin, Assistant City Manager