

City of Alexandria, Virginia

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3-11-03

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 3, 2003

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER *PS*

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF A GRANT APPLICATION TO THE BEAUMONT FOUNDATION OF AMERICA FOR NEW COMPUTER EQUIPMENT AT CHARLES HOUSTON RECREATION CENTER

ISSUE: City Council consideration of a grant application to the Beaumont Foundation of America for new computer equipment at Charles Houston Recreation Center.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

- (1) Approve the submission of the grant application to the Beaumont Foundation of America in the amount of \$27,000 for new computer equipment at Charles Houston Recreation Center; and
- (2) Authorize the City Manager to execute all documents that may be required.

It should be noted that this grant opportunity was only very recently announced and that the grant application is due on March 31, 2003. Staff are currently collecting the required information for the application.

BACKGROUND: In 2001, the Recreation Department began a concerted effort to modernize its public use computer lab operations through a Digital Campus program. Because the City has not historically approved any new funding for the public use labs to upgrade the computer equipment, the Department relies in part upon private contributions and/or grants to carry out the Digital Campus program in the recreation centers. Six recreation centers currently have space available for computer lab operations which, depending on the center, are able to accommodate from 5-13 work stations.

The program is a main part of the Department's effort to help bridge the digital divide in Alexandria. Although 100 percent of the ACPS classrooms have at least one computer connected to the Internet, a significant number of children return to homes that do not have a home computer. The Department provides computer labs so that these children can continue their computer learning outside of school. Outside of the after school programming, the computer labs are also available to adults and high school students who wish to use a computer. The standard package of software available on the computers includes the Microsoft Office suite and a variety of children's educational software.

The Department also strives to incorporate structured learning opportunities into the program. Classes are offered through a combination of in-house staff, volunteers, and partnerships with non-profit agencies that provide computer instruction.

DISCUSSION: The public use computer equipment at Charles Houston Recreation Center is old and should be replaced with more modern technology. The equipment consists of first-generation Pentium computers that were donated to the center. In order to effectively run the variety of software packages that the Department strives to make available to its patrons, more powerful and reliable equipment is necessary.

According to its mission, the Beaumont Foundation enriches the lives of individuals by providing technology to historically underserved schools and communities. The Foundation makes awards to approximately one-half of the states in the United States each year, and Virginia is included in the 2003 cycle. Eligible organizations include non-school government entities. Grant awards range from \$20,000 to \$100,000 and are made in the form of Toshiba branded equipment available off the product list. The Department plans to apply for the fixed lab package of \$27,000, which includes a server, 10 computers, two printers, a projector, a digital camera, and a scanner.

Charles Houston Recreation Center meets the main criteria established by the Foundation, which are to serve citizens that are at or near the poverty level. Participants in the after school program come mainly from Jefferson Houston and Maury elementary schools, where 75 percent of the children are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

FISCAL IMPACT: The Beaumont Foundation grant would include equipment and the operating system. The City would be required to purchase all software and provide regular maintenance and trouble shooting that falls outside the product warranty. It is estimated that the cost of software to be absorbed by the City would be approximately \$8,000.

In addition, the City would have to continue to fund any paid programming for the computer lab. To keep these costs down, the Department currently strives to partner with non-profits and volunteers to provide opportunities for computer instruction to patrons. Paid computer class instructors would cost approximately \$15-20 per hour. Prior to accepting any grant funding that is awarded, the Department will identify the source of the funds that will be used to pay for software and any other costs associated with the new computer equipment.

STAFF:

Brian Albright, Division Chief/Administration, Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities