

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 15, 2003

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO # 37 : FUNDING REQUEST FOR MEALS ON WHEELS
(COUNCILMAN SPECK'S REQUEST)

This Budget Memo is in response to a request made by Councilman Speck at the April 2 Budget Public Hearing for a recommendation on funding for the Meals on Wheels program, as requested by Senior Services of Alexandria.

BACKGROUND: Meals on Wheels, operated in Alexandria since 1965, is a volunteer-run program serving a lunch and hot dinner to an average of 92 homebound seniors per weekday. The volunteer serving as coordinator of the program is Grace Sills. The meals are prepared by INOVA Alexandria Hospital and packaged and delivered by volunteers over seven routes throughout the City. The volunteers are obtained from 31 churches and synagogues which are assigned a specific day each month. As with many programs that use volunteers, Meals on Wheels has experienced increasing difficulty finding people available during working hours to load meals into the volunteers' cars and to deliver the meals.

Of the average of 92 seniors served by Meals on Wheels per weekday, the Department of Human Services, Office of Aging and Adult Services subsidizes an average of 45 lower income seniors using Older American Act funds. The average cost for the subsidized meals is \$63,600 per year. The total cost of food for the Meals on Wheels program for FY 2003 is estimated to be \$140,000. The difference between the total cost of the meals and the City subsidy is what the private pay (over the subsidy income) recipients of Meals on Wheels pay for their meals plus about \$9,000 in donations from local churches and synagogues.

DISCUSSION: In July 2002, the Department of Human Services (DHS) was asked to review the program after it was brought to the Mayor's attention that the program was struggling to find volunteers. As DHS investigated the situation, it became apparent that there are several organizations in Alexandria which prepare and deliver meals to seniors. It was determined that an examination of this senior meal system was warranted. Therefore, staff of DHS contacted Senior Services of Alexandria to temporarily assist the Meals on Wheels program through September 30 of this year, while all meals preparation and delivery organizations could be brought together to study the most efficient and effective approach to serving meals to seniors in the City.

Senior Services of Alexandria agreed to assist and obtained a grant for \$8,000 from the Winkler Foundation, which was supplemented with \$5,000 from DHS, to pay for a part-time kitchen coordinator and administrative costs of Senior Services of Alexandria through September 2003. The coordinator has been working 3.5 hours each morning, Monday through Friday at INOVA Alexandria Hospital, packaging the meals and loading volunteers' cars for delivery. Senior Services of Alexandria has applied for a \$20,000 Community Partnership grant, which would begin in October of 2003 to pay for the kitchen coordinator and their administrative costs for the remainder of FY 2004.

In order to address the longer range plans for the Meals on Wheels program, DHS has held several meetings with the major providers of meal service delivery in the City, including Meals on Wheels, ALIVE! (emergency food deliveries and Last Saturday Food Program), ARHA (congregate meals at Charles Houston and home delivered meals at the Ladrey and Annie B. Rose senior high-rises), DHS (congregate meals, home delivered meals, emergency food needs, transportation), Catholic Charities (congregate meals, emergency food pantry and financial assistance) and the Sheriff's Office (food preparation for Jail inmates).

The purpose of these meetings was to look at the scope of needs within the City, identify which organizations were meeting these needs, and to determine how the programs were organized. Information was gathered on whether vendors were used to prepare the meals, how delivery systems were set up, what eligibility guidelines were used for participation in various programs, and funding sources.

The group brought together by DHS is in the process of analyzing the information to determine whether a more cost efficient approach is possible that would streamline the system, eliminate any duplication of services, and reduce the overall costs to enable improvements within the current budgets. The goal is to complete the analysis and make a recommendation to the City Manager before the end of FY 2003. The cost of a streamlined program will not be known until the analysis is completed, but staff estimates the cost at \$20,000 per year in increased City funding.