

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JANUARY 18, 2005

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF ALLOCATING HOUSING TRUST FUND MONIES TO REBUILDING TOGETHER ALEXANDRIA, INC. (CHRISTMAS IN APRIL)

ISSUE: Consideration of an application for Housing Trust Fund monies from Rebuilding Together Alexandria, Inc. (RTA)¹.

RECOMMENDATION: That the City Council approve \$35,000 in Housing Trust Fund monies to support the cost of supplies and materials to repair or renovate ownership housing units that RTA approves for National Rebuilding Day (and any required follow-up), with up to 25% of the funds available to pay for skilled labor at these units. The funding agreement will include clauses that require documentation of safety training for volunteers and other protection from liability for the City.

BACKGROUND: RTA, formerly known as Christmas in April, is a private, non-profit organization that repairs and renovates the homes of low income families, elderly persons or persons with disabilities. The organization utilizes mostly volunteers to complete the renovations on the last Saturday of April, referred to as National Rebuilding Day (NRD). There is no charge to the homeowners for this service. In recent years, RTA has added a year-round component to its program to address emergency repair needs, such as an urgent roof or plumbing repair. For this work, RTA utilizes skilled trades people. In addition, RTA utilizes skilled trades people on NRD for the same types of repairs, which are beyond the scope of work that can reasonably be expected from volunteers.

DISCUSSION: RTA is requesting a total of \$35,000 in grant funding to support the cost of supplies and materials to repair or renovate ownership units, with up to 25% of the funds available to pay for skilled labor at these units. Based on budget information provided by RTA, staff has determined that the requested amount is appropriate to support the budgeted expenditures.

¹ This organization was formerly known as Alexandria Christmas in April, and has also been referred to as Alexandria Christmas in April Rebuilding Together (ACIART).

RTA will use the requested Housing Trust Fund (HTF) monies to pay for supplies, materials and skilled labor needed for repairs to be made on NRD at the homes of elderly, disabled and/or low-income City homeowners. Up to 25% of the requested funding could be used for skilled labor for repairs that are beyond the scope of the volunteers' abilities (i.e. plumbing, heating or electrical work). RTA will use these monies only for homes approved for renovations on NRD, which this year will be April 30, and any required follow-up to these homes as a result of NRD activities.

RTA has received funding from the HTF for the last four years. The annual funding amount has increased from \$25,000 to \$35,000 during that time. The Affordable Housing Advisory Committee and City Council approved RTA's FY 2004 funding application for \$35,000 last spring, and RTA is requesting the same amount in FY 2005. RTA also receives City funding from the Community Partnership Fund (CPF) administered by the Office of Management and Budget (\$12,000 in FY 2004 and \$6,000 in FY 2005), and \$2,612 from the Office of Aging and Adult Services.

In the past, staff has been concerned about RTA's dependence on City funds. In keeping with City recommendations, RTA has increased its non-profit/foundation grant application activity. RTA's FY 2005 budget includes \$15,000 from outside grant sources, and this year's application notes nine outside applications for a total of \$76,000 in requests. Three applications totaling \$21,000 have been declined; one application for \$10,000 was funded at \$5,000; the others are pending. In FY 2003 and 2004, RTA received only \$3,169 and \$500, respectively, from such outside grant sources.

Last year, RTA served 52 households on NRD, fewer than both the 60 to 80 it projected for FY 2004 and the 78 households it served in FY 2003. RTA staff indicated that the lower number was due in part to receiving funding confirmation too late in the process. RTA turned away 15 applicants in FY 2004 because it did not have sufficient funding or sufficient time to find volunteers for the projects. RTA proposes to serve 55 to 60 households this year, and its application to the HTF is earlier than last year so that RTA staff can better plan for the number of projects that the organization can handle on NRD.

The Affordable Housing Advisory Committee approved this request at its January 6, 2005 meeting.

FISCAL IMPACT: Expenditure of \$35,000 in Housing Trust Fund monies.

STAFF:

Mildrilyn Stephens Davis, Director, Office of Housing

Bob Eiffert, Deputy Director, Office of Housing