

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: SEPTEMBER 6, 2005

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF A GRANT APPLICATION TO THE VIRGINIA LAND CONSERVATION FOUNDATION FOR FUNDING TO ACQUIRE A PUBLIC ACCESS EASEMENT ALONG THE MT. VERNON TRAIL WATERFRONT ON THE HUNTING TOWERS SITE

ISSUE: City Council consideration of a grant application to the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation for funding to acquire a public access easement along the Mt. Vernon Trail waterfront on the Hunting Towers site.

RECOMMENDATIONS: That City Council authorize the City Manager to:

- (1) Submit the grant application to the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF) for funding in the amount of \$500,000 to assist in the acquisition of a public access easement along the Mt. Vernon Trail waterfront; and
- (2) Execute all necessary documents that may be required.

The grant application is due to the VLCF on September 20, 2005. The Open Space Steering Committee has endorsed the submission of this grant request and staff is working with the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust to prepare the grant application. Staff will submit the grant proposal to the Foundation, contingent upon City Council's approval.

BACKGROUND: The City's Open Space Plan was adopted by City Council in 2003. The plan sets forth 15 goals that are designed to protect the City's open spaces and identify additional open space opportunities. In 2003, City Council also created the Open Space Fund and voted to allocate one cent of the City's real estate tax rate to assist with the purchase of open space and easements. At the recommendation of staff, the services and expertise of the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (NVCT) were contracted to negotiate and, where appropriate, hold the conservation easements. In addition to the establishment of this fund, City Council requested that staff explore additional financing alternatives for open space acquisition.

Established by the State in 1999 to help fund the protection of the State's natural and cultural resources, the VLCF provides one such means of additional funding. Funds from the Foundation can be used by State agencies, local governments, public bodies and registered (tax-exempt) nonprofit groups to establish permanent conservation easements and to purchase open space and parklands, land of historic or cultural significance, farmlands and forests, and natural areas.

DISCUSSION: The Mount Vernon Waterfront Trail Easement (see attached) is identified as a priority site in the City Council approved 2004 Open Space Committee Report. In consultation with NVCT, staff is preparing a request for funding from the VLCF to help in the acquisition from the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) who currently owns the site of a public access easement next to Hunting Towers along the waterfront. Acquisition of an easement at this site meets a number of the Open Space Plan goals, and it is also consistent with three goals contained in City Council's 2004-2009 Strategic Plan: Quality Development and Redevelopment that is Well Planned and Consistent with Alexandria's Vision; A City that Respects, Protects and Enhances the Natural Environment; and An Integrated, Multi-modal Transportation System that Efficiently and Effectively Gets People From Point "A" to Point "B." If the requested funds are awarded by VLCF, the acquisition of this easement will help to provide a permanent trail alignment and create multi-modal paths closer to the waterfront. It should be noted, that there are also plans by VDOT in this specific area to reconstruct wetlands as mitigation for those wetlands lost to the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Project.

FISCAL IMPACT: Total proposed project costs included in grant applications to VLCF must be a minimum of \$100,000, with the grant request no less than \$50,000. VLCF requires a 50% minimum match. The \$500,000 grant request to VLCF will indicate that \$500,000 in matching funds will come from the City's Open Space Fund. In addition providing the required match funds, the City also would be responsible for any costs above the required match to fulfill the grant intent to acquire the easement. The cost of the easement may substantially exceed the \$500,000 State grant and \$500,000 City match. If so, additional Open Space funds would likely be used to help close any funding gap. VDOT's participation in funding (since this is a bike and pedestrian trail) the cost of purchasing the easement is also being sought.

ATTACHMENT: Map of Proposed Easement

STAFF:

Mark Jinks, Assistant City Manager

Kirk Kincannon, Director, Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

Laura Durham, Open Space Coordinator, Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

Michael Nardolilli, President, Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, Consultant to the City

