

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MAY 2, 2012

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: RASHAD M. YOUNG, CITY MANAGER *RM*

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF AN APPLICATION TO THE USDA'S AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE GRANT PROGRAM FOR A FARMERS' MARKET PROMOTION PROGRAM GRANT

ISSUE: Consideration of a grant application for the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) Farmers' Market Promotion Program (FMPP), under the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

- 1) Approve the submission of the grant application (due May 21, 2012); and
- 2) Authorize the City Manager to execute the documents that may be required.

BACKGROUND: The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service has announced the availability of approximately \$10 million in competitive grant funds in FY 2012 to be awarded through the Farmers' Market Promotion Program. This grant program is designed to promote the domestic consumption of agricultural commodities by expanding direct producer-to-consumer marketing opportunities. The minimum award per grant is \$5,000 and the maximum is \$100,000.

DISCUSSION: During a recent review of the Market Square Farmers' Market and a survey of both Market customers and vendors, several significant areas of improvement were identified. The March 21, 2012 docket item to City Council relating to adjusting the hours of operation at the Farmers' Market identified these areas of improvement as follows:

- 1) **Increase marketing of the Farmers' Market;**
- 2) **Enable the use of Credit Cards, Debit Cards and Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Cards;**
- 3) **Eliminate Cash Payments by Vendors to the City for Farmers' Market Fees;**
- 4) **Standardize spaces allocated to vendors to maximize utilization of space and reduce inequality among vendors; and**

5) Increase the City's revenues and rates to support service efforts.

In response to the first item on this list, the Department of General Services is developing a proposal for the FMPP grant program that includes up to \$100,000 in funding to increase marketing activities and improve outreach and collaboration among the several farmers' markets located in the City of Alexandria. More specifically, the proposal involves improved signage, marketing packets/brochures, enhancements to the website, as well as other improvements relating to media and outreach. The City's proposal also identifies improvements to outreach and collaboration among the several farmers' markets in the City. These improvements might include elements such as training for market staff, a mobile commercial kitchen for cooking demonstrations, or even organizing friendly competitions among the various markets to help attract new customers.

There are currently two other efforts related to improving the Farmers' Market but are not part of this particular grant proposal. First, General Services is working to develop a partnership with the Health Department in order to integrate farmers' markets into the Healthier Alexandria initiative. Also, staff is coordinating with some local non-profit organizations with the goal of piloting EBT capabilities at the Market Square Farmers' Market.

FISCAL IMPACT: The Department of General Services is requesting \$100,000 in grant funds for marketing improvements and enhanced outreach for the Market Square Farmers' Market as well as the other farmers' markets located in the City. This grant has no required matching funds and staff does not anticipate any fiscal impact of note. The City will be responsible for the normal administrative costs associated with this grant, including financial and reporting oversight provided by the Department of General Services, as well as the Office of Management and Budget, and the Finance Department. Per the grant parameters, any awarded funds would not be available for use until October 1, 2012 and full implementation of any proposed improvements would need to be completed no later than September 30, 2014. There is no guarantee of continued funding after that date, either from Federal or City sources.

STAFF:

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