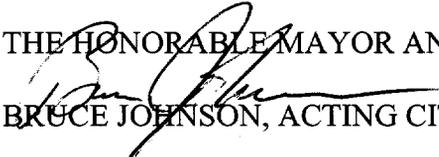


City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: SEPTEMBER 2, 2011

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM:  BRUCE JOHNSON, ACTING CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: APPROVAL OF A GRANT APPLICATION TO THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (USDA) FOR THE PEOPLE'S GARDEN PROGRAM

ISSUE: Consideration of a grant application submitted in response to USDA People's Garden Program during City Council summer break.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

- (1) Approve the submission of the grant application (submitted Tuesday, August 23, 2011); and
- (2) Authorize the City Manager and the Health Director to execute the necessary documents that may be required.

BACKGROUND: On July 26, 2011, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced a funding opportunity through National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) to support establishing People's Gardens in communities. The primary goal of this grant program is to create locally sponsored, self-sufficient gardens in communities that will improve food access and serve as science-based informal educational sites for the community. The grant proposal was due on August 26, 2011.

After consultation with the City Manager's Office, the Alexandria Health Department applied for the USDA/NIFA funding in collaboration with the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria, the Virginia Cooperative Extension, the Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia, the Alexandria Childhood Obesity Action Network, and the Northern Virginia Health Foundation. Total funding requested was \$58,080 over two years.

The purpose of the proposal is to increase access to healthy food for low income residents of Alexandria and Arlington, Virginia, by increasing the number of community gardens available for them through community organizations and affordable housing developments in both communities. The partners proposed to increase the total number of gardens by at least 15 – this will be accomplished by expanding the capacity of local organizations to host People's Gardens and by providing technical assistance to those organizations' staff and participating gardeners in horticulture, gardening, leadership, nutrition, and healthy cooking.

DISCUSSION: In 2009, the Alexandria Childhood Obesity Action Network (a work group of the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria), the Virginia Cooperative Extension, and the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA) began a collaboration that has expanded access to healthy foods. It has established 30 new family gardens and a children's garden on ARHA property; it continues to provide horticulture education and technical assistance through Master Gardeners volunteers; two local chefs teach healthy cooking classes; and volunteers conduct read-aloud sessions for children on topics such as gardening, physical activity and healthy food. In the first year volunteers contributed over 1,600 volunteer hours to the project. At the end of the first growing season, according to a survey conducted by the Alexandria Health Department:

- 54% of participants reported that they spent less money at the grocery store during the gardening season.
- 38% of participants reported eating more vegetables since they started gardening.
- 77% reported that they got to know their neighbors better as a result of gardening.

The above work was recognized and reinforced by Council's support of the Healthy Foods Resolution passed in March 2010, which emphasized the need to increase low income residents' access to healthy food.

The new work plan in the grant proposal to USDA/NIFA is a natural extension of this gardening work. Similarly this summer, Arlington County Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources, collaborated with Virginia Gardens, a low income community in Arlington, to establish a communal garden for its residents, most of whom are Spanish-speaking. Master Gardeners are working with resident gardeners on-site and Virginia Cooperative Extension nutrition staff is providing nutrition education to residents.

As a result of these pilot projects, the Alexandria Childhood Obesity Action Network has experienced a demand for technical assistance from organizations that want to establish gardens with low income residents they serve. To meet that demand, the partners have already scheduled a workshop for October 2011 on how to start a community garden with a focus on planning and management. With funding from the People's Garden program, we will be able to further build upon and extend our work into the community.

The partners will provide an initial training for organizations and groups interested in starting a People's Garden on methods to launch and manage a successful garden. Participants in the workshop will then be invited to submit applications to receive a micro-subgrant to help establish a People's Garden. Gardening and horticulture workshops will be offered to participating gardeners and coordinators of organizations sponsoring the garden, as well as ongoing technical assistance. To help gardeners prepare their produce in a healthy way, nutrition and healthy cooking workshops will also be offered.

FISCAL IMPACT: The Alexandria Health Department and the *Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria* requested \$58,080 from USDA/NIFA over two years to fund:

- Partnering with the Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Master Gardeners to provide technical assistance and education to community organizations and participating gardeners;
- Providing start-up gardening funds and supplies for participating organizations through a micro-subgrant program; and
- Hiring a part-time Gardening Coordinator consultant within the Health Department to work approximately 15 hours per week to assist with technical assistance.

No City funding match is required; however, combined partner in-kind funding currently committed amounts to more than \$53,000.

STAFF:

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