

CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA



Agenda Date:	June 20, 2023
Action Required:	Approval by Council of a resolution to reprogram unspent CDBG funds to facilitate ADA-compliant accessibility enhancements to one or more City parks
Presenter:	Alexander Ikefuna, Director of Community Solutions, Anthony Warn, Grants Analyst
Staff Contacts:	Anthony Warn, Grants Analyst
Title:	Minor Budget Amendment to Reprogram FY 2017-2019 Community Development Block Grant Funds - \$30,000 (1 of 2 readings)

Background

The City of Charlottesville has been an Entitlement Community (EC) as designated by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) and has been the recipient of annual allocations of federal funds through HUD's Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) program. While the city has used these CDBG funds over the years to support many beneficial community development programs, in some prior years not all of the funds awarded by the city to specific subrecipient programs were fully utilized.

To ensure the effective and efficient use of federal funds, HUD has established rules requiring the timely use of CDBG funds for the benefit of recipient communities. These rules spell out specific time periods during which awarded funds must be used, after which they are at risk of being reclaimed by HUD to be awarded to other communities. In addition to losing the use of these funds to benefit city residents, having funds reclaimed by HUD puts future awards at risk of being reduced, an outcome we would very much like to avoid.

Discussion

HUD's CDBG programs are designed to advance several core community development goals, chief among them being the creation of suitable living environments for all. As such, CDBG funds are allocated to localities with statutory guidance that "makes specifically eligible the removal of material and architectural barriers that restrict the accessibility or mobility of elderly or handicapped persons" (Source: HUD Guide to National Objectives and Eligible Activities for CDBG Entitlement Communities at hudexchange.info).

HUD guidance also speaks repeatedly to the importance of increasing community access to public amenities, such as municipal parks. Charlottesville is home to a number of high quality community and regional parks that serve both city and country residents and which are staffed by a dedicated and highly capable Department of Parks & Recreation. A recent informal survey of these parks indicates some areas where accessibility to park amenities can be significantly enhanced, such as by

replacing older, narrow pathways with new, fully ADA-compliant pathways.

At Washington Park, for example, an existing pathway leading from the public sidewalk into the park and towards the main building and the public restrooms is narrow and uneven in some spaces and consists of loose gravel in others, all of which combine to impede access for mobility impaired visitors to the park and for participants in the city's Adaptive Recreation programs. The proposed program will fully replace these older, difficult to traverse pathways with new wider paved paths that are fully ADA-compliant that will significantly improve access to the park for those who may be mobility challenged.

Parks & Rec staff also report that it can at times become difficult to hear one another during specific indoor activities with many participants and that enjoyment for participants may be enhanced by the installation of decorative sound baffles on certain portions of the walls and in certain ceiling spaces. Parks & Rec staff also indicate that the preferred sound baffles can be installed by current city employees.

Program staff also indicated that participants could benefit from additional accessible picnic tables, similar to those already in place in the covered patio area, so as to provide program participants and park visitors with additional accessible seating options near the playground area.

Alignment with City Council's Vision and Strategic Plan

The proposed reprogramming of unused prior years CDBG funds for the proposed programs is not only in alignment with federal law, specifically the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), but by helping to reduce barriers to access to public amenities is also deeply aligned with Council's vision of Charlottesville as 'A Connected Community' and as a 'Community of Mutual Respect.'

Community Engagement

In keeping with the intent of HUD's community development programs and with the spirit of Council's vision for Charlottesville as a city that is 'flexible and progressive in anticipating and responding to the needs of our citizens,' this proposal builds on active community involvement. Specifically, in developing this plan OCS staff consulted with several staff from the city's Department of Parks & Recreation, including experienced maintenance staff and supervisory staff from the city's Adaptive Recreation programs for residents experiencing physical and/or intellectual disabilities.

The proposed reprogramming of CDBG funds will also address community interests by addressing some of the citizen complaints filed through the city's MyCville citizen complaints hotline.

Budgetary Impact

As the funds to be used by the proposed program are federal funds already awarded to the city in prior years, the proposed course of action is not anticipated to impact the city budget and will instead serve to address important community needs while maintaining the city's eligibility for future awards of CDBG funds.

Recommendation

Staff recommends Council approval of the proposed resolution to reprogram unused CDBG funds from prior years to address current accessibility needs in one or more city parks.

Suggested motion: "I move that Council approve the RESOLUTION appropriating unused Community Development Block Grant funds from prior program years to fund accessibility improvements in one or more City parks."

Alternatives

Given that the funds to be used have been previously awarded to the city but have not been used within the HUD-mandated time frame and are therefore at-risk of reclamation by HUD, no alternatives have been considered.

Attachments

1. Resolution_Reprogramming CDBG Funds from Fiscal Years 2017-2019 to Enact Accessibility Enhancements