

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: DECEMBER 1, 2020

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: YON LAMBERT, DIRECTOR, T&ES

SUBJECT: RESCINDING VDOT PROJECT AGREEMENT FOR BACKLICK RUN

SUMMARY: The purpose of this memo is to inform City Council that, as part of the December 8, 2020 supplemental appropriation ordinance, staff is proposing actions that will serve to rescind an existing \$5.0 million Smart Scale competitively awarded grant and related agreement with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) for the \$7.4 million Backlick Run Trail Phase I project, which has been held up by redevelopment that did not occur as previously projected. VDOT has indicated that it needs a formal action by Council to rescind the project grant agreement and that this proposed appropriation amendment can serve that purpose. Because the Smart Scale funds were competitively awarded based on a detailed scoring process (a relatively new process for VDOT) these funds may not be reallocated by the City to another project. The remaining \$2.4 million of project funding is comprised of Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) and Regional Surface Transportation Program (RSTP) grant funds that will be retained and reallocated in the future to other capital projects as part of the FY 2022 CIP decision making process.

BACKGROUND: In 2015, the Backlick Run Trail was identified as a priority project in the Eisenhower West Small Area Plan and the Transportation Master Plan. Phase I of the Backlick Run Trail will extend from Armistead Boothe Park to the Van Dorn Street bridge (Attachment 1). The City sought grant funding and was awarded a total of \$7.4 million to implement Phase I of the project as part of the Eisenhower West plan. The project funding included \$5 million in Smart Scale, \$2.1 million of CMAQ and \$0.3 million of RSTP funds.

However, it has now become clear the City cannot utilize the grant funds to build the Backlick Run Trail at this time because development did not occur at the pace initially projected. The City does not currently own enough right-of-way to construct the trail, and impacted properties have not yet indicated a timetable for redevelopment. Obtaining the needed right of way would significantly impede existing business operations adjacent to the proposed trail site. City staff have, instead, developed initial trail concepts and conditions for consideration during future development special use permits. One parcel (600 S Pickett St) has already committed to construct parts of this trail, including pedestrian/bicycle bridge, through development conditions.

More importantly, the Backlick Run Trail project (funded in FY 2018) is now considered overdue by VDOT, which sets milestones for completion as part of the Smart Scale process. Therefore, because the trail cannot be built at this time and in order to retain the City's competitiveness for future grants, T&ES staff recommends rescinding the City's \$5 million Smart Scale funding request. VDOT has indicated this is the agency's preferred approach and, if anything, may improve the City's chances of being awarded future Smart Scale grants since rescinding a request for an idle project demonstrates good stewardship of limited public dollars. Canceling the project agreement for the Smart Scale funding request will also enable the City to reprogram \$2.1 million in CMAQ and \$.3 million in RSTP funds that were initially included as part of Backlick Run Trail project. The CMAQ funds could go instead to the Beauregard Trail project which, if constructed, would provide a shared-use path on North Beauregard Street between King Street and Seminary Road (Attachment 1). A decision on the use of those CMAQ funds is proposed to be made as part of the FY 2022 CIP decision making process.

FISCAL IMPACT: In order to rescind the project agreement, staff proposes that Council act through the supplemental appropriations ordinance on December 8, 2020. This will enable the City to both take necessary action to rescind the Backlick Run agreement and re-appropriate \$2.4 million in grant funds (\$2.1 million in CMAQ funds and \$0.3 million in future RSTP funds) into contingent pending the proposed FY 2022 proposed CIP.

Although the initial Backlick Run project estimate was \$7.4 million, only a portion (\$2.9 million) has been previously appropriated and, of that, \$0.7 million is VDOT Smart Scale funding. Therefore, the appropriation ordinance will propose that Council:

1. De-appropriate \$2.9 million previously appropriated in the City CIP for the Backlick Trail Project,
2. appropriate \$2.1 million in CMAQ grant funds to a CIP project contingent, and
3. earmark \$0.3 million in FY 2024 RSTP funds to a CIP project contingent.

The appropriation ordinance amendments described above will be reflected in Section 7 of the Supplemental Appropriation Ordinance docket memo.

ATTACHMENT:

- 1- Location Map: Backlick Run Trail & Beauregard Trail

cc: Mark Jinks, City Manager
Emily Baker, Deputy City Manager
Terry Suehr, Director, Project Implementation
Hillary Orr, Deputy Director, T&ES
Tarrence Moorer, Division Chief, Strategic Management Services, T&ES
Christopher Ziemann, Division Chief, Transportation Planning, T&ES
Alexandria Carroll, Urban Planner III, Transportation Planning

ATTACHMENT 1: Backlick Run & Beauregard Trail Map

