



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: NOVEMBER 6, 2013

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: RASHAD M. YOUNG, CITY MANAGER/s/

DOCKET TITLE:

Consideration and Approval of the Request to Release Urban Forestry Contingent Reserve Funding.

ISSUE: Release of \$80,000 from Contingent Reserve to Urban Forestry Program.

RECOMMENDATION: Request the approval of release of \$80,000 from Contingent Reserve for a pro-active tree maintenance program. This allocation request will fund a pro-active tree pruning and maintenance effort along several major roadways and in Parks throughout the City.

BACKGROUND: City Council approved the Urban Forestry Master Plan in September 2009. Records estimated that there were 17,000 street trees, and an additional 50,000 trees in parks, schools, public open space, and on other public properties. The Urban Forestry Section of the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities manages the City's urban forest, including tree planting, maintenance (pruning), removals, and related tasks. In addition to responding to Service Requests by residents, the Urban Forestry Section is also one of the City's primary emergency response groups. Major storm events often cause significant tree damage. Following the June 2012 derecho, for example, our regular work plan was set back by approximately 30 days due to the diversion of resources to immediate and long-term storm debris cleanup. Additionally, Urban Forestry staff regularly responds to after-hours emergency calls of downed trees or fallen limbs blocking roads.

Residents generate much of tree work through requests for service. Means of contact include Call-Click-Connect, e-mail, or phone calls. In Fiscal Year 2013, the Urban Forestry Section handled 1,427 Service Requests, and initiated 2,693 Work Orders, which represented increases of 11.8% and 8.5%, respectively, over Fiscal Year 2012. Due to budget constraints, funding declined in relation to workload for Urban Forestry contract services and administrative support since implementation of the Urban Forestry Plan. The Forestry budget experienced a \$72,000 reduction in Fiscal Year 2013.

Current management of the City's urban forest is mostly reactive because of our resources and the number of

outstanding Work Orders. At the beginning of Fiscal Year 2013, the backlog stood at 800 requests. Currently we operate with a backlog of approximately 400 requests. To achieve a 60 day service cycle time, the requests would need to reduce to a range of 100-200.

Our performance standard is to investigate each Service Request within five business days. We communicate our findings with the resident and initiate the work order cycle. The timeframe for completion of the job varies significantly, depending upon the priority of the Work Orders. Imminent safety issues or transportation blockages are always higher priorities. The removal of a fallen tree or limb in a roadway treated as an emergency and handled immediately. However, non-emergencies may take several months. Planting constraints further impact completing requests since that work occurs in the spring and fall, when weather conditions permit.

In the FY2007 Operating Budget, \$80,000 was set aside in the Contingent Reserves to fund tree maintenance. This funding anticipated support of the upcoming of the Urban Forestry Master Plan. It was set aside “should it be needed once the Urban Forestry Master Plan is approved by City Council.”

The City of Alexandria’s Urban Forestry Master Plan 2010 recommends that the City pursue a pro-active five-year pruning cycle for all established trees in a block-to-block program. This reduces the average unit cost of pruning a tree by an estimated 25%. This pro-active tree pruning cycle is a “best-practice” model for managing an urban forest. However, the City has not been able to achieve the goal of a five-year cycle due to the funding limitations. In Fiscal Year 2013, we did make progress to catch up on needed tree maintenance work along major roadways throughout the City. RPCA used approximately \$150,000 in one-time savings from numerous staff vacancies. As a result, the department accomplished pruning (and some removals) of approximately 600 trees on King Street, Washington Street, Mt. Vernon Ave., Van Dorn Street, in Fort Ward, Stephenson Square Park, and throughout Warwick Village.

The requested release of Contingent Reserve funding will allow us to continue these pro-active pruning efforts along other major roadways and parks in the City. In addition to being more efficient than scattered reactive maintenance efforts, pro-active block pruning removes dead limbs and other hazards that tend to fall during storms, blocking roads and causing other damage. Consequently, residents will see a reduction in disruptions and adverse impacts from tree problems.

DISCUSSION: This allocation request will fund a pro-active tree pruning and maintenance effort along several major roadways and in Parks throughout the City. Specifically, this allocation will fund the maintenance of approximately 320 trees on Commonwealth Ave., U.S. Route 1 (Patrick and Henry Streets), Duke Street, Russell Road, Edsall Road, and in City Parks including Ben Brenman, Boothe, Ft. Ward, and Chinquapin. A private contractor under supervision of Urban Forestry staff will perform the work. Such a pro-active tree maintenance program is one of the major recommendations of the City Council approved Urban Forestry Master Plan (Recommendation #39). Rather than reacting to damage and hazards when trees and limbs fail, we will be able to address and correct many potential problems in a planned, cost effective and more manageable process. This will be more efficient than reacting to problems after they occur, and will improve the level of service for our residents and businesses. The proposed use of these funds does not obligate the City for future operating or capital costs.

FISCAL IMPACT: One-time release of the Contingent Funds set-aside for the Urban Forestry services. No fiscal impact on the current operating budget.

ATTACHMENT:

Attachment 1 - 2007 Budget Urban Forestry Contingency

STAFF:

Debra Collins, Deputy City Manager

James Spengler, Director, RPCA

Dinesh Tiwari, Deputy Director, RPCA

Robert Taylor, Division Chief, RPCA