



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

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MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** FEBRUARY 18, 2015

**TO:** THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** MARK B. JINKS, ACTING CITY MANAGER /s/

**DOCKET TITLE:**

Consideration of a Grant to the Arlington and Alexandria Offices of the Virginia Cooperative Extension to Support the Expansion of the Energy Masters Program to Alexandria.

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**ISSUE:** Consideration of a grant to the Arlington and Alexandria offices of the Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) to support the expansion of the Energy Masters Program to Alexandria.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council approve the allocation of \$20,000 from the Office of Housing's federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) earned deliverable fees to the Virginia Cooperative Extension to support the organization's expansion of the Energy Masters Program into the City of Alexandria.

**BACKGROUND:** Energy Masters, modeled after the popular Master Gardeners Program, has been sponsored by VCE and Arlingtonians for a Clean Environment (ACE) since 2011. Through this initiative, VCE and ACE have trained 126 volunteers as Energy Masters and have completed energy and water saving improvements in 474 apartments serving lower income residents in Arlington County. VCE and ACE estimate that the work has provided total annual savings of \$93,550 on electricity and water bills in the apartments. These savings are the result of a reduction of 186,806 kilowatt hours of energy use and 5,863,130 gallons of reduced water use. On a per unit basis, savings in electric bills are estimated at \$49 annually and \$183 in savings from water use reductions.

The goals of the proposed project are to 1) reduce energy costs for both residents and property owners of assisted rental communities, 2) improve the energy efficiency of these units, 3) improve the comfort of the homes, and 4) improve the quality of life for City residents by decreasing the amount of greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere. By working with residents and property owners, this initiative will make rental homes more affordable by reducing energy costs. Other key benefits of the program are the engagement of volunteers in education and improvement activities as well as sharing information with residents of assisted



housing, such as how to best use green building features, and fostering long term changes in resident energy use practices. While Rebuilding Together Alexandria currently assists owner-occupied households with energy efficiency and other home improvements, no City service provider is currently offering the improvements to assisted rental units that are proposed through the Energy Masters program.

**DISCUSSION:** VCE and ACE have requested funding to support the Energy Masters Alexandria program for a two-year cycle which will serve an estimated 125 rental units. While volunteers train and serve at no cost, supplies costs are estimated at \$60 per unit with the balance of funding used for training and coordination costs. Staff recommends that units owned by the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA) be targeted first for the improvements. ARHA staff has identified as many as 300 units that could be served through the program. These include many scattered site units as well as smaller communities where redevelopment or significant rehabilitation is not anticipated in the near term. City staff will assist VCE and ACE in volunteer outreach and recruitment, coordination of work sites, and assistance as needed on work days.

In addition to expansion of the Energy Masters Program into Alexandria, ACE proposes to apply for grant funding under the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Environmental Education Model Grants Program to conduct educational outreach in Arlington County and the City of Alexandria. It is expected that this funding, if awarded, will be used to fund a part-time program coordinator position to conduct energy education sessions at public schools in the two jurisdictions. The grant program also includes a mini-grant requirement which would allow ACE to provide funding directly to school groups working on issues of environmental quality and stewardship. VCE staff has existing relationships with the Alexandria City Public Schools and will coordinate administration of the programs directly through those partnerships. This program will operate independently from Energy Masters but is noted because of the value added service that ACE proposes to provide to Alexandria residents. Applications for this grant program are due to the EPA by March 6.

The activities to be conducted through the Energy Masters Program are consistent with Goal 7 of the Housing Master Plan which calls for increasing public awareness of the benefits of healthy, well-designed and energy efficient housing. The program is also consistent with the City's Strategic Plan Goals 2 and 5, the Eco-City Charter, Environmental Action Plan, and the Energy and Climate Change Action Plan. The improvements will also align with Office of Housing goals and strategies in addressing residential energy efficiency through housing rehabilitation.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** Staff recommends that funding for the Energy Masters Program be provided from unobligated funds generated through the City's Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) grant. This grant, awarded to the City in 2009 by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), has generated a small amount of deliverable fees based on program accomplishments. These funds have typically been used to fund carrying costs or unexpected repairs to units acquired through the program but the proposed use is consistent with allowable expenditures and program goals. The proposed allocation to the Energy Masters initiative will not impact the continued operations of the NSP. A two year program is anticipated. The Alexandria program is not expected to continue beyond the initial two year period. However, should additional opportunities for energy savings be identified among the City's stock of assisted housing, VCE, ACE and the City will pursue other funding resources to support the program.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Energy Masters Proposal

**STAFF:**

Helen McIlvaine, Acting Director, Office of Housing



Shane Cochran, Implementation Division Chief, Office of Housing  
Bill Eger, Energy Manager, Department of General Services