



Legislation Text

File #: 14-4527, Version: 1

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: NOVEMBER 18, 2015

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

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

DOCKET TITLE:

Consideration of the Carlyle Vitality Initiative Update and Proposed FY 2016-2017 Strategy and Estimated Budget.

ISSUE: Consideration of a Carlyle Vitality Initiative update and proposed FY 2016-2017 strategy and estimated budget.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council receive the update and endorse the proposed program and funding strategy for activation of the Carlyle public realm.

BACKGROUND: In an effort to enhance neighborhood vitality and quality of life for Carlyle residents, employees, and visitors, as well as to improve the Carlyle area's competitiveness in the regional office market, the City Manager designated an interdepartmental/interagency team to lead a Carlyle Vitality Initiative in December 2014. The initiative is intended to focus on implementing physical and programming enhancements to the Carlyle neighborhood in order to activate the public realm. Fortunately, as part of the development approved for the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office a developer contribution of \$1.8 million was proposed to provide future benefits to the Carlyle area. The proposed activities and initiatives are proposed to be paid for by this fund and not the City's General Fund. It is also a reaction to changed office market conditions where neighborhood vitality is now a prime factor in office leasing decision making.

After its establishment in late 2014 the City's interagency team undertook to get stakeholder feedback and then start to implement some initial activities. Activities and accomplishments since January 2015 were:

- Held Carlyle area employee and resident stakeholder group meetings in February and March 2015 to gather input on desired programs and improvements

- Created Carlyle Vitality website to promote programs and activities
<<http://www.alexandriava.gov/CarlyleFun>>
- Hired a Public Relations/Marketing firm (after a competitive selection process) to evaluate current Carlyle branding, and produce an action plan for Carlyle branding, marketing, programming
- Held *Lunch Break Power Hour* in June 2015 with 9 local business partners, and more than 200 Carlyle employees in attendance
- Made weekly visits with the Alexandria Mobile Art Lab
- Held 1 *Alexandria Movies Under the Stars* in John Carlyle Square
- Held 5 *Summer Twilight Concerts* in John Carlyle Square
- Piloted “*Get Moving In Carlyle: Workouts in the Square*,” 8 weekly workouts in September through November of 2015, in partnership with 3 local yoga and fitness studios

In summer 2015, the City worked with the selected public/relations marketing firm (Neighborhood Restaurant Group Consulting) to refine existing Carlyle branding, develop a strategy for activation and programming, and propose a menu of initiatives, events and activities to follow through on the strategy. The strategy is responsive to feedback from Carlyle residents and employees, the Carlyle Community Council, the City’s interagency Carlyle vitality team, and the overall program mission to enhance neighborhood vitality and quality of life for Carlyle residents, employees, and visitors, as well as to improve Carlyle’s competitiveness in the regional office market. Below is a summary of the strategy and planned activities.

Proposed Activation Strategy FY 2016-FY 2017

- Develop programming that captures and builds on Carlyle’s strengths and character as a hub of innovation that is inventive, creative, evolving, and a place for experimentation. Alexandria’s most urban setting lends itself to more inventive programming, edgy art and space activation than other parts of the City.
- Focus on building the sense of community within Carlyle, for Carlyle. Promoting Carlyle outside of the district is a longer term goal that should be pursued only after progress is made within the community.
- Activate the community with programming tailored to employees and residents. Both audiences want more life on street, more food and drink options, more opportunities to engage with neighbors. Scheduling must be responsive to unique Carlyle work schedules and encourage interaction of the different audiences of workers and residents.
- Implement new branding strategy with banners and holiday lights; ensure new branding is consistent across all Carlyle collateral.
- Enable and encourage self-directed and passive use of space with public art installations, tables and chairs, giant games, “play me” pianos, and by providing Wi-Fi in John Carlyle Square.
- Create layers of stimulation to activate spaces/events by using a mix of food, art, music, and a variety of independent and directed activities.
- Partner with local businesses and non-profit partners that resonate with Carlyle innovation and creativity for programming.

Action Plan December 2015 - December 2016

Consistent with the strategy outlined above, the City’s Carlyle vitality group has begun and is proposing to implement a variety of events to engage the different audiences within the community over the upcoming year. In addition, the group proposes to implement visual branding and activation of the Carlyle district, including installation of holiday tree lights and Carlyle wayfinding banners on light poles using newly developed branding. Activating the public realm with self-directed activity is another key element of the overall strategy,

utilizing inexpensive improvements that encourage people to gather in public spaces. Recommended improvements are café tables, chairs, and umbrellas, large format games such as chess, interactive public art, pop-up art or retail space, Wi-Fi in John Carlyle Square, and a shade structure similar to types identified in the Waterfront Plan for John Carlyle Square.

Recommended programming and tasks through December 2016 are detailed in Attachment 2 and summarized below:

Programming

- Monthly morning coffee cart/music event
- Monthly Lunch event in Carlyle Square with food and music
- Monthly Happy Hour in Carlyle Square with food and music
- Monthly Game Day in Carlyle Square at lunchtime
- Workouts in the Square
- Ongoing visits by Mobile Art Lab
- Summer Twilight Series
- Alexandria Movies Under the Stars

Tasks:

- Execute Memorandum of Understanding with Carlyle Community Council for John Carlyle Square
- Explore options/process for re-naming of Eisenhower Avenue Metro Station
- Launch Wi-Fi in John Carlyle Square
- Install Carlyle district banners
- Install self-directed public realm activation: Tables, chairs, umbrellas, large scale games
- Install holiday lights (FY 2017) once necessary outlets are installed

Cost Estimates

The first three years of the effort (FY 2016-FY2018) are identified as a pilot period to test the strategy and adjust programming based on feedback and feasibility. A three year estimated budget (Attachment 3) has been developed as a working draft to be refined by the Carlyle vitality group as needed, and would be included in future annual budget proposals.

It is recognized that a revenue source(s) will need to be identified over the long term once the \$1.8 million is fully drawn down. In FY 2018, at the end of the pilot period, staff proposes to engage a consultant to explore and recommend a long term governance and revenue strategy so that the effort can be sustainable over the long term. Without revenue, and with spending at about \$275,000 annually, the fund would be depleted by FY 2022. The goal is to implement a structure in FY 2019 so that by FY 2020 the program can begin to be self-sustaining.

FISCAL IMPACT: Funding for this effort is available from the City’s “Trellis Fund,” an account funded in March 2007 as part of a minor amendment to SUP #2253 that required Carlyle developer contributions to the City in lieu of fulfilling a requirement to build rooftop trellises. The primary intent of the Trellis Fund is to

enhance the public open space and its use within Carlyle and bring vitality to the Carlyle community. The current Trellis Fund balance is \$1.8 million. To date, the majority of the costs for the Carlyle vitality effort have been borne with existing staff resources and partnerships with local businesses. A small consulting contract (\$8,000) to examine Carlyle branding and develop a programming strategy is the only item to date that has utilized the Trellis Fund.

As indicated in their September 2015 letter, (Attachment 1), the Carlyle Community Council supports the use of the Trellis Fund for the work of the Carlyle Vitality Initiative, and will continue to partner with the City on this effort. The Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Activities and the Carlyle Community Council are also working to update their Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for use of open space.

To date, the majority of the costs for this effort have been borne with existing staff resources and partnerships with local businesses. Funding in the amount of \$1.8 million is available from the City's "Trellis Fund." Future supplemental appropriations approvals will authorize staff to utilize the Trellis Fund resources to implement the program.

The estimated budget for the pilot period, detailed further in Attachment 3, is \$692,000 (\$174,000 in FY 2016, \$255,000 in FY 2017, and \$293,000 in FY 2018). These costs include supplementing staff resources with professional assistance to organize, promote, and execute the events proposed, as well as the cost of the events and programming. In each upcoming budget year City Council will have the opportunity to amend this multi-year plan.

STAFF:

Emily Baker, Deputy City Manager

Karl Moritz, Director, Planning and Zoning

James Spengler, Director, Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities

Carrie Beach, Division Chief/NPCD, Planning and Zoning

Stephanie Landrum, Director, Alexandria Economic Development Partnership

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: September 22, 2015 Letter from Carlyle Community Council

Attachment 2: Action Plan December 2015 - December 2016

Attachment 3: Budget Narrative for Pilot Period FY 2016-FY 2018

Attachment 4: Presentation