



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

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MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** SEPTEMBER 30, 2020

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

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

**DOCKET TITLE:**

Consideration of Submission of a Grant Application for a Circuit Court Records Preservation Program, Item Conservation Grant from the Library of Virginia.

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**ISSUE:** The Library of Virginia (LVA), Circuit Court Records Preservation Program provides grants to Clerks of Court to preserve and restore records of historical value. To participate in the program it would require an application from the Clerk of Court.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council:

- (1) Approve a grant application totaling \$15,375, to be submitted not later than October 31, 2020, to the Library of Virginia. The exact amount awarded will be determined by the Library of Virginia Grants Review Board which consists of LVA historical and conservation experts along with four Circuit Court Clerks; and
- (2) Authorize the City Manager and the Clerk of the Circuit Court to execute all necessary documents that may be required.

**BACKGROUND:** The Alexandria Circuit Court is the Court of Record for the City of Alexandria. As such, the Clerk's records are the permanent chronicles of many important events in the City. The Clerk of Court is the legal custodian of these records and is charged by the Virginia Code to protect and preserve them, and to provide public access. These records include such things as land transactions, marriage licenses, wills and trusts, military discharge records, and criminal and civil judgements issued by the court. From a historical standpoint, many of these documents are invaluable and show who lived in Alexandria, where people lived, where they did business, and for the antebellum records, even the buying and selling of human beings both in slavery and indentured servitude. Preserving these records enables the City and future generations to know more about the City's forbearers through some of these residents' most important life events.

**DISCUSSION:** The Library of Virginia, Circuit Court Records Preservation Program provides grants to Virginia Clerks of Court to preserve and restore records of historical value. The program focuses on records that are significant both because of age and content. The program also focuses on records in danger of loss due to deterioration. Alexandria's Clerk of Court has many records going as far back as the 1700s that are eligible for this program. The Clerk also has numerous records that need restoration due to earlier efforts at preservation, such as a previous lamination program that hastens decline by reacting with the ink and paper to create an acid that

destroys the document. The program also provides for the digitization of the records as they are conserved. These high-resolution images are then made available to the public, allowing far wider reach for historical researchers, and, especially in the time of a pandemic, research that does not require a visit to the courthouse.

Earlier this year, the Clerk of Court reached out to the LVA and invited their preservation staff to come to Alexandria to examine our records for inclusion in the grant program. After delays because of the pandemic, this visit took place in August and a few weeks later the LVA staff reported back with a recommendation as to the most endangered records to be conserved first if Alexandria chose to apply. The grant program is available each year and its limited funds are apportioned throughout the Commonwealth. This application is the first application for Alexandria. If awarded the grant, approximately four volumes of records could be approved per jurisdiction. The volumes included in Alexandria's application are the ones recommended by the LVA specialists. They include: Marriage Register 1870-1895, Marriage Register 1905-1916, Will Book, 1870-1892 and Deed Book 1787-1789.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** There is no match requirement, and therefore no additional cost to the City is incurred by applying for the grant. Although this is a competitive grant and funds awarded may not equal the request, participation in the process provides an opportunity to secure at least some funding for conservation and digitization of important Alexandria historical records. If the request were only partly granted, the records conserved and digitized would be adjusted to the grant amount with no additional cost would be borne by the City. Funds awarded are paid to the City's Treasurer which then, after acceptance by the Clerk of Court, provide the funds to the LVA-approved conservation vendor.

**ATTACHMENTS:** None.

**STAFF:**

Laura B. Triggs, Deputy City Manager

Greg Parks, Clerk of Court

Quanice Lawson, Budget Analyst, Office of Management and Budget

John Knippenberg, Chief Deputy / Fiscal Officer, Clerk of Court