



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

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MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** APRIL 21, 2021

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

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

**DOCKET TITLE:**

Consideration of a Resolution Approving the City's Community Funding Priorities Submission to Congressman Beyer for Federal Funding Consideration. [ROLL-CALL VOTE]

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**ISSUE:** Consideration of a Resolution Approving Community Funding Priorities and Surface Transportation Act Funding Submission to Congressman Beyer for Funding Consideration.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council adopt a resolution (Attachment 4) approving the City's Community Funding Priorities and Surface Transportation Act Funding Submission to Congressman Beyer for funding consideration.

**BACKGROUND:** In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed and magnified the need for investment in infrastructure, human services, community and economic development and other priorities in communities across the country, the United States Congress and the Executive Branch have identified numerous avenues for significant, direct investment in communities. These funding opportunities are intended to create jobs, invest in both people and infrastructure, and work to address the ongoing needs of families, businesses, neighborhoods and communities across our country.

Currently, these funding opportunities include Community Project Funding in appropriations bills in Fiscal Year 2022 and the Surface Transportation Act Reauthorization Bill.

In February, 2021, House Appropriations Committee Chair Rosa DeLauro announced that the House of Representatives will accept Member requests for Community Project Funding in appropriations bills for Fiscal Year 2022.

Community Project Funding, often colloquially referred to in the past as "earmarks," provides members of

Congress the opportunity to direct funding to priority projects in their districts/states and provide targeted assistance to their communities, particularly now as the pandemic exposed many inequalities and needs in communities across the country. Community Project Funding is intended to allow Members of Congress, who well understand the needs of their districts and states, to target funds for important projects that can solve policy problems and create jobs in the communities they serve. It is also thought that the reintroduction of earmarks will be a boost to bi-partisanship in Congress.

In announcing the return of “earmarks,” which were “banned” in 2011 after several high-profile cases of abuse and mismanagement, Chair DeLauro also announced that the Appropriations Committee will enforce a set of important reforms that build on existing House Rules and prioritize accountability, transparency, and strong community support. The goals of the reforms are to produce a small number of projects with strong community support, a transparent process where no member’s family can benefit and where projects are audited to ensure money was spent as proposed and planned.

In the House, each Member will be limited to 10 total Community Project Funding requests for FY 22, and the total funding for these projects cannot be more than 1% of overall federal discretionary spending. Each project must be for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 only and cannot include multiyear funding. Since appropriations are annual bills, the funding will need to be spent one to two years from the enactment of the bill, so any project needs to be “shovel-ready.” In addition, only certain areas of appropriated funds are available for Community Project Funding. Of the 12 annual appropriations bills, 10 are open for Community Project Funding. Of the 10 bills open to requests, each have only a handful of federal accounts and programs available for requests (Attachment 1), so not all seemingly worthy projects qualify for this narrowly defined Community Project Funding.

The Senate is widely expected to craft its own process for including Community Project Funding in its appropriations process, but neither a timeline nor a formal agreement between the Chamber’s leaders has been announced.

In addition to Community Project Funding through the appropriations process, the Surface Transportation Act reauthorization legislation includes opportunities for member-directed funding and significant, direct investment in transportation and transit projects in communities across the country. In total, each House member will be limited to about \$15 million in transportation projects district-wide.

**DISCUSSION:** After being briefed by staff from Congressman Don Beyer’s office on the Community Project Funding opportunity, City staff solicited project ideas from Departments as well as City Council. Guidance from the Congressman’s staff included the requirement that eligible projects be “shovel ready” and could be completed in FY 2022, cost guidelines limiting proposals to under \$2 million, and Congressman Beyer encouraged multi-jurisdictional/regional projects.

Staff received 24 project proposals for consideration for Community Project Funding. After comparing the projects to the eligible funding areas, the project list was winnowed down to seven proposals which fell within the available funding areas, which were presented to the Congressman and his staff for their consideration for Community Project Funding. It is likely that just a few of these projects will be proposed by Congressman Beyer’s Office for funding as well as the dollar amounts for the selected projects will be likely less than the full amounts that were put forward by the City. City staff also presented the Congressman and his staff with those proposals which didn’t fall within currently eligible funding areas in the materials provided to the Congressman, with the understanding that while not eligible for Community Project Funding, the proposals were worthy projects and proposals and should be on their radar for future funding opportunities. All proposals are included in Attachment 2.

The seven projects and proposals submitted to Congressman Beyer for consideration for Community Project Funding are:

1. Re-employment and upskilling programs and services;
2. Regional trauma-informed crime prevention and intervention through engagement, equity and asset development<sup>1</sup>;
3. Flash flooding “spot improvement” projects;
4. Seed funding for Alexandria Arts District;
5. Deployment of body worn cameras in the Alexandria Police Department<sup>3</sup>;
6. Early childhood education - aligning early childhood education and school readiness with best practices that lessen negative impacts on children, families and the community;
7. Four Mile Run restoration - urban deck environmental remediation and design<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to the Community Project Funding opportunities through the appropriations process, the Surface Transportation Act reauthorization bill which will be considered by Congress this year includes opportunities for member-directed funding and significant, direct investment in transportation and transit projects in communities across the country.

City staff was briefed by staff from Congressman Beyer’s office on this funding opportunity and were given guidelines and direction on projects eligible for this funding. Guidance from the Congressman’s staff included the requirement that eligible capital projects must fall under definition in U.S. Code Title 23 (highway) and Chapter 53 (transit), the expectation that project funds are able to be obligated over 4 years, and - again - the encouragement of multi-jurisdictional/regional projects. It should be noted that because the Alexandria DASH system has never been “federalized” it currently cannot directly receive certain federal transit grants. At my request DASH and T&ES are currently preparing an analysis of what becoming federal grant eligible would mean and a pathway for DASH to become federal grant eligible.

Staff worked with Transportation and Environmental Services and Arlington County to determine projects which would be eligible for directed funding through the Surface Transportation Reauthorization Bill and identified four projects (Attachment 3) which met all criteria only one project is likely to be selected:

1. Design and construction of the Mt Vernon Bridge connecting Alexandria and Arlington<sup>1</sup>;
2. I-395 at Duke / Landmark - Improved Landmark redevelopment site access<sup>1</sup>;
3. Acquisition and redevelopment of the Norfolk Southern rail spur right of way for a non-motorized trail in Old Town North;
4. Bridge preventative and restorative maintenance;
5. ADA and Rapid Response Pedestrian Safety in High Transit and Equity Areas.

One of the requirements of the new Community Project Funding process and directed funding in the Surface Transportation Reauthorization Bill is that members of Congress must provide evidence of community support for the projects they are asking to direct funding to, as well as compelling evidence that demonstrates a true need. This includes endorsement by elected officials and other organizations.

The resolution (Attachment 4) expresses the support by City Council for these local, community priorities and endorses them for consideration for federal funding opportunities. In addition it calls upon our Congressional delegation to support these local priorities in the areas of human services, community development and infrastructure and work to secure federal funding for these projects and programs. The resolution, once adopted,

will be transmitted to Congressman Beyer and his staff, as well as the other members of the Alexandria Congressional Delegation Senators Warner and Kaine, as evidence of Council's endorsement of these priority projects for consideration for funding through the Community Project Funding opportunities in the appropriations bills and directed funding opportunities in the Surface Transportation and Reauthorization Bill.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Community Project Funding - Eligible Funding Areas
2. City of Alexandria Community Project Funding DRAFT Proposals, April 6, 2021
3. City of Alexandria Surface Transportation Funding Projects, April 16, 2021
4. Resolution Identifying City of Alexandria Priorities for Federal Funding Opportunities and Requesting Congressional Delegation Support

**STAFF:**

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