



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MAY 16, 2023

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

THROUGH: JAMES F. PARAJON, CITY MANAGER /s/

FROM: GREG PARKS, CLERK OF COURT

DOCKET TITLE:

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

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

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

1. Approve a grant application totaling \$40,348.50, to the Library of Virginia. The amount awarded has been 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 Alexandria. As such, its 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 for they show who lived in Alexandria, where they 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 us and future generations to know our forbearers through some of the most important events in their lives.

DISCUSSION: The Library of Virginia, Circuit Court Records Preservation Program provides grants to 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. It 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. The Clerk also has numerous records that are in need of restoration due to earlier efforts at preservation, such as an ill-advised lamination program that actually 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.

Previously, 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. LVA staff reviewed our records and provided the Clerk with a list of records they recommend for preservation and the order in which it should be done. The highest priority is given to records in danger of becoming illegible due to age and damaging prior preservation efforts.

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, funds awarded equal the request, and in no instance will additional cost be borne by the City. Funds awarded are paid to the City's Treasurer/Department of Finance which then, after acceptance by the Clerk of Court of the preserved documents and processing by the Grant Administrator, provides the funds to the LVA-approved conservation vendor.

ATTACHMENTS: None.

STAFF:

Jean Kelleher, Interim Deputy City Manager

Pelin Tekneci, Budget Analyst, Office of Management and Budget

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