

# City of Alexandria, Virginia

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## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** MARCH 14, 2016

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

**THROUGH:** MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER 

**SUBJECT:** BUDGET MEMO #4: CONSOLIDATION OF SENIOR CONGREGATE MEAL PROGRAMS/CHARLES HOUSTON

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This memorandum responds to questions from Mayor Silberberg and Councilwoman Pepper regarding the proposed consolidation of congregate meals programs in the Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) budget.

The FY 2017 budget proposed the consolidation of the City's two-site senior congregate meals program into one site at an annual savings of \$100,000. Subsequent to this recommendation, I was made aware that this reduction would have programmatic impacts that went beyond just the meal program. As described in the following memo, DCHS staff has been meeting with stakeholders in the last few weeks and as a result the original reduction proposed will be substantially revised. Between the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA) and the City, we will find the necessary funds for non-meal related elements of the Charles Houston program.

### **BACKGROUND**

In existence for more than thirty years, the City's senior center congregate meal programs serve City residents age sixty and older with a program as defined by the Virginia Division for the Aging (VDA) Congregate Nutrition Services Standards. Enrollment priority is given to individuals with the greatest economic and social needs. Special emphasis is placed on low-income minorities, those with limited English proficiency, and individuals at risk for institutional placement. The senior centers provide opportunities for socialization, education, physical activity, and community engagement. One (1) hot lunch meal is served each day the senior centers are open. The City provides door-to-door transportation to both senior centers and transportation for scheduled field trips.

The DCHS contracts with two vendors to operate weekday congregate meal programs at two sites in the City: (1) the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA) currently operates a Congregate Meal Senior Center at the Charles Houston Recreation Center, and (2) Catholic Charities operates a Congregate Meal Senior Center at St. Martin de Porres. Seniors are transported by DCHS to the Senior Centers where they may engage in social and recreational activities and receive a USDA approved hot lunch.

Current activities offered at the Charles Houston Congregate Meal Senior Center:

- Exercise – power walking, yoga, stretching,
- Arthritis Foundation Exercise – an Evidenced Based program supported with additional federal funds provided by DAAS
- Intergenerational programming with organizations including Burgundy Farms School
- Dance
- Health and wellness presentations
- Nutrition education programs, including presentations by DAAS staff
- Discussion groups
- Cognitive activities – trivia, games, puzzles, reading
- Program planning involving center participants
- Crafts
- Seasonal special events and celebrations
- Field trips – transportation provided by DAAS
- Music therapy
- Shopping trips – transportation provided by DAAS
- Comfort and Cheer – discussion group led by DAAS Geriatric Mental Health staff
- Computer lab
- Pickleball – provided by Parks & Recreation Dept.

**RATIONALE FOR THE PROPOSED REDUCTION INCLUDED IN THE FY 2017 PROPOSED BUDGET**

This reduction was recommended as an efficiency as it was felt that it would be possible to accommodate the number of seniors currently receiving services through a single contract and a single location. The total current budget for the ARHA program at Charles Houston is \$180,000. The FY 2017 proposed budget includes a \$100,000 reduction based on the assumption that \$80,000 should remain in the FY 2017 budget to cover possible increased costs for transportation of seniors to the single site, as well as possible senior-oriented programming and events at the Charles Houston site to continue some social and recreational activities in lieu of the congregate meals. This reduction was identified for the ARHA contract due to the consistently lower attendance numbers at the Charles Houston site and the small number of attendees (7 on average) who partake of the meals, which is the primary purpose of the program. In addition, there is larger space available at the St. Martin's site to accommodate additional participants.

Site	Average Attendance	Average # Eating Lunch
Charles Houston Center	25	7
St. Martin's	48	46

**UPDATE SINCE RELEASE OF THE BUDGET**

The budget recommendation of consolidating the programs and holding the program primarily at the St. Martin's location was troubling to the current members of the Charles Houston program and was not an approach they felt was acceptable. DCHS and ARHA met with the seniors who have been involved in the program on March 7<sup>th</sup> to hear their concerns and recommendations.

Prior to that meeting, DCHS met with ARHA and the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities (RPCA) to discuss possible programming options and alternative approaches to provide services and supports to the seniors at Charles Houston that would provide some level of continuing opportunities for seniors at Charles Houston. All partners committed to working together to assure that service offerings would be available to seniors who wanted to remain with the program at the Charles Houston site.

During the meeting on March 7<sup>th</sup>, the participants stated their desire to keep the program length, frequency and staffing the same as it had been, with the only change being the elimination of the USDA meal program and its attendant requirements. It was shared that DCHS, ARHA, and RPCA would have to reconvene to determine how they might support this proposal. DCHS shared that its proposed budget includes only \$80,000 of the \$180,000 cost available to support the program and so there was a significant gap in the funding availability. ARHA committed to exploring what funds it could contribute to support the program. ARHA Board approval would be required for this to take place.

A second meeting was held on March 9<sup>th</sup> with participants of the program, along with representatives from the faith community, community advocates and residents. During that meeting, attendees reiterated that in their view the movement of the program would be destructive to the community and would not be supported by the members.

DCHS made clear that it was committed to keeping a program at Charles Houston and that it would be possible to have individual meals delivered to the site for those participants who still would like to have a meal. It was again communicated to the members that DCHS only had \$80,000 available to support the programming and that ARHA would be confirming its level of investment once ARHA Board approval was acquired. The next ARHA Board meeting will be in early April. DCHS committed to keeping the participants updated as additional information became available. *Once it is clear what the necessary fund restoration should be, the monies will be identified and Council will have the opportunity to correct what I view as a budget reduction* that should not have been proposed.

cc: Roy Priest, Chief Executive Officer, ARHA