

CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA



Agenda Date:	May 3, 2021
Action Required:	Approve resolution supporting the Safe Routes to School Non-Infrastructure Grant Application
Presenter:	Amanda Poncy, Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator
Staff Contacts:	Kyle Rodland, Safe Routes to School Coordinator
Title:	Safe Routes to School Non-Infrastructure Grant Application

Background:

In the winter of 2021, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) announced another year of Safe Routes to School Non-Infrastructure (Activities and Programs) Grants. These grants, for amounts between \$5,000 and \$100,000, can be used to fund **education, encouragement, evaluation** and **enforcement** programs related to Safe Routes to School (SRTS). The Non-Infrastructure Grant can also be used to fund a SRTS coordinator position. A SRTS Coordinator is a part- or full-time SRTS advocate who works within a school division to promote and facilitate Safe Routes to School activities at a minimum of three schools in the division.

Last year, the city received a non-infrastructure grant in the amount of \$76,000 to fund a full-time coordinator and associated program budget to manage, train, and expand Safe Routes to School programming city-wide. The grant provides a dedicated champion to working within schools to provide education, encouragement and evaluation activities needed to support active transportation for K-8 students.

Discussion:

As part of the grant application, the City was required to update the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program Plan, a written document that outlines a community's intentions for enabling and encouraging students to engage in active transportation (i.e. walking or bicycling) as they travel to and from school. The plan details the number of students living within ¼ to 2 miles of their school and demonstrates the potential benefits that can be accrued from a coordinated SRTS program (nearly 30% of students live within ½ mile of school and nearly 70% live within 1 mile of school). The SRTS Program Plan was originally created through a team-based approach that involved key community stakeholders and members of the public in both identifying key behavior-related to barriers to active transportation and, using the four non-infrastructure related E's (education, encouragement, enforcement and evaluation) to address them.

The City of Charlottesville Safe Routes to School Initiative aims to:

1. Increase the number of students using active transportation to get to & from school, especially among those living within one mile of their school.
2. Reduce the number of injuries suffered by school-aged students walking & biking.
3. Raise awareness of the benefits of active transportation to students, parents, & the community at large.
4. Reduce traffic congestion & greenhouse gas emissions.
5. Promote lifelong healthy habits.

Since the program started in 2016, there has been an observed increase in walk/bike travel to/from school from an average of 7%, to an average of 14% (for K-8 students city wide). Data is based on travel tallies taken annually in schools. In addition, Bicycle and Pedestrian education is taught in every public school, grades K-8, there is an established free helmet program for city school students and there are fleets of 25 bikes at 6 city schools.

This year's Program Plan update reflects minimal changes from last year's plan, but emphasizes lessons learned since our Coordinator was hired in October 2016. The following will items will continue to be emphasized as part of the program:

- Institute bike riding, repair, and safety curriculum
- Develop a division-wide SRTS website social media presence
- Regularly host walk- and bike-to-school events
- Conduct Neighborhood Bike Repair Days
- Expand the bike helmet give-away program
- Administer student travel tallies
- Monitor school transportation data and keep records of participation in workshops, biking and walking trains, bike rodeos, afterschool clubs, and other events

The SRTS Activities and Programs Plan will continue to serve as a guiding document to assist in promoting, encouraging, and enabling walking and bicycling to school. The \$60,000 grant request will allow the City to continue to fund a full-time Safe Routes to School Coordinator and the supplies needed to implement the recommendations included in the Program Plan. As a reimbursable grant, costs will be incurred by Public Works and reimbursed by VDOT.

Alignment with City Council's Vision and Strategic Plan:

This initiative supports Council's Vision to be a "Connected Community" ("the City of Charlottesville is part of a comprehensive, regional transportation system that enables citizens of all ages and incomes to easily navigate our community") and "America's Healthiest City" ("we have a community-wide commitment to personal fitness and wellness, and all residents enjoy our outstanding recreational facilities, walking trails, and safe routes to schools").

In addition, the project contributes to Goals 1 and 3 of the Strategic Plan, to be an inclusive, self sufficient community and a healthy and safe city.

The initiative further implements recommendations within the Comprehensive Plan (2013), Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan (2015) and supports the City's Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Resolution.

Community Engagement:

This grant application implements one of the programming recommendations included in the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan (adopted 2015), which included significant public involvement. Further, city staff from Neighborhood Development Services worked with staff from the Thomas Jefferson Health District and Charlottesville City Schools (Physical Education and Pupil Transportation) to create a Safe Routes to School Task Force in 2016 that was responsible for outlining elements of a city-wide Safe Routes to School Activities and Programs Plan (APP). The task force included representatives from city schools, community organizations, multiple city departments (NDS, Public Works, Parks and Recreation), as well as health and enforcement disciplines. The APP was developed by the task force with input from parents (via Parent Survey) and further discussed/refined at public meeting in February 2016. The Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee provided feedback on the updates every year since. This year a public meeting was held on February 24, 2021, to gather community feedback.

Budgetary Impact:

The grant application will provide funding for both a full-time Safe Routes to School Coordinator and the supporting activities included in the Activities and Programs plan. The grant will fund a position for 12 months. The grant requires a 20% match (cash or in-kind donations are acceptable). There is no budgetary impact at this time, as this resolution is just Council approval for the City to apply for this grant and continue this program. Should the grant be awarded a separate appropriation will come before Council with the full grant amount, match amounts and sources of the City match identified.

Recommendation:

Staff recommends support for the Safe Routes to School Non-Infrastructure grant application.

Alternatives:

If the full grant amount is not awarded, the position could be funded part-time. Alternately, Safe Routes to School programming could potentially continue in an ad-hoc fashion with assistance from local P.E. teachers, community partners and parent volunteers.

Attachments:

Safe Routes to School Activities and Programs Plan

<http://www.charlottesville.org/departments-and-services/departments-h-z/neighborhood-development-services/transportation/bicycle-and-pedestrian/safe-routes-to-school>

A Resolution Supporting Safe Routes to School Projects

RESOLUTION
Supporting Safe Routes to School (“SRTS”) Projects

WHEREAS, obesity is one of the most serious threats to American public health, ranking third among preventable causes of death in the United States;

WHEREAS, motor vehicle crashes are also a leading cause of death and injury to children;

WHEREAS, between 1969 and 2009 the percentage of children walking and biking to school dramatically declined from 48 percent to 13 percent;

WHEREAS, the Safe Routes to School program, created by Congress in 2005, aimed to increase the number of children engaged in active transportation when traveling to school by funding (1) infrastructure projects, located within two miles of a public school, that directly increase safety and convenience for public school children walking and/or biking to school, and (2) non-infrastructure projects designed to encourage public school children to walk and bicycle to school;

WHEREAS, Safe Routes to School projects are a proven, effective approach to increasing the number of children actively traveling to school by foot or bike;

WHEREAS, Safe Routes to School projects provide important health, safety, and environmental benefits for children, including reducing risk of obesity/chronic disease and pedestrian/bicycle injuries as well as improving air quality;

WHEREAS, the need for Safe Routes to School projects is especially strong in low-income areas, which suffer from a disproportionately high incidence of both childhood obesity/chronic disease and pedestrian and bicycle injuries and often have inferior pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure;

WHEREAS, Safe Routes to School projects make it safer and more convenient for all residents to walk and bike to destinations, further promoting public health;

WHEREAS, a goal of the City of Charlottesville’s current Comprehensive Plan, Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, Complete Streets Resolution and Healthy Eating Active Living Resolution supports active transportation options, which can be met in part by implementation of Safe Routes to School projects;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City of Charlottesville affirms its commitment to active transportation and supporting Safe Routes to School infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects.