

Item 23-1199: Request to approve the Neighborhood Grant Program request submitted by the Historic Central Neighborhood

Community & Economic Development Committee

Wed, Oct 11, 2023, 6:30PM

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 01:28

So we don't officially have any public hearings or appearances, but since there are members of the community who have come here this evening to speak on our action item, we're going to invite you to speak. Do you have the signup sheet? Can I get that?

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 01:53

Thank you. So unlike the full Council meetings where we've got the timer and you can see, I'm just going to ask you to keep your comments brief and to not necessarily repeat something that someone just said. And, but—and so we'll move along. I appreciate you coming here and speaking tonight. So the first person we have signed up is Brianne Connolly. So we'll just have you come to the microphone, state your name and address for the record.

Brianne C. (Resident) 02:29

Okay, hi, everybody. My name is [Brianne C.] and I live at [XXXXXX]. I am here I guess with understanding that everybody kind of already has seen the what's happening. Okay, good. I didn't know if it was gonna get presented or not. But, so yes, supporting the Columbus playground renovation. I just want to throw out a couple words. I invited a lot of neighbors to come tonight and a lot have come so that's wonderful. But, um, there were a few that couldn't that just had a couple messages. So I'm just going to say a little bit about that, and then let the other people kind of expound who want to speak.

Brianne C. (Resident) 03:04

But so I spoke with Nate (he does not live in our neighborhood, but he is the director of the Boys and Girls Club that uses the facility every weekday afternoon), and he says that he hopes you all see the importance of the project. Surya is a neighbor on State Street, and she is also the mom of a child that ABS which is across the street; they also use the Columbus playground, the kids do. He's—her son's a fourth grader at ABS. She says regarding the project, "I love this. You have my support." And then Christie who lives on Spring Street, she wrote, or she said, "I saw this proposal in the newsletter—" we send out monthly newsletters, or quarterly newsletters—so she said, "I saw this proposal in the newsletter, and I think it looks awesome. It seems like a great plan to better use that space." Thanks.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 03:54

Thank you. All right, our next person signed up to speak is [Ann H.].

[Ann indicated that she was there in support but did not want to speak.]

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 04:04

Alright, thank you. And then we have Oliver and I—Madeline Zornow.

Oliver Zornow (Building For Kids) 04:15

Thank you so much. I'm Oliver Zornow. This is my daughter, Madeline. We live at [XXXXXX]. We're super grateful that the committee is considering this proposal and that the staff has recommended it. In a time when we

consider green space a very important priority in the in the city, we look at the city's most densely populated area, and we need more green space. And this project accomplishes just that. So thank you for your support and Madeline has two words to say.

Madeline Zornow (Resident) 04:41

Thank you.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 04:42

Thank you. Thank you, Madeline. All right. The next person we have signed up is **[Elizabeth S.]**.

Elizabeth S (Resident) 04:53

Hi, I'm **[Elizabeth S. at XXXXX]**. I don't have a lot to say. My kids go to ABS which is across the street, and they use the playground at Columbus, and they love to play soccer and would love to see some grass there so they can play soccer. And I just think it's going to be great for the whole community. It's not just about the schools that are right there. There are lots of kids, including my family, who play there after school and on the weekends. So it's gonna be great for the whole community. Thank you.

[There was a brief discussion that took place partially off microphone in which city staff asked to clarify that "ABS" was short for Appleton Bilingual School.]

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 05:37

Thank you. All right. And I have skipped a line because we have **[Pierce and Rebecca Z.]**.

Rebecca Z. (Resident) 05:55

Hello, my name is **[Rebecca Z.]** and this is my son **[Pierce Z.]**. We live at **[XXXXX]**. Both of my kids attend Columbus Elementary, and I would like to speak in favor of funding the renovation of our neighborhood playground. Nearly a decade ago, Columbus students shared about their dreams for their neighborhood playground. They wrote "I really wish the playground had grass. I would like for us kids to have a big grassy field so we can play football, soccer, and other things. I want the kids to have a soft landing and not a hard or pokey landing. Grass—that would be so cool, but I don't know if you can afford that though."

Rebecca Z. (Resident) 06:32

73% of students polled nearly a decade ago mentioned grass in their dream playground renovation. The children who wrote these statements are now in high school, perhaps adults. They never got to play on **[unclear]** grass at their elementary school and neighborhood park, the Columbus playground. There is now a new generation of students in our neighborhood. Students who chip their teeth when they fall while running, skin their knees while trying to build confidence in sports and play, students who sit on asphalt for their field day picnics. Green space is a simple but essential thing and we're missing it.

Rebecca Z. (Resident) 07:08

The Columbus playground is a landmark of Appleton's historic central neighborhood. It's used as a de facto neighborhood park for community events like Porch Fest, as well as by two schools. It's easy for families to access and has more visibility than Arbutus park which makes it especially good for younger demographics gaining independence. For this proposed playground renovation, ideas were generated via Columbus staff who know the playground best, neighborhood families, community partners, and students. And yes, the proposed layout has plenty of grass. Thank you.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 07:44

All right, thank you. Um, so the next person we have signed up is **[Sandy G.]**. And is this Richard with you?

Sandy G. (Resident) 07:55

No. So I signed up. This is—we're the Gibson family. I'm [Sandy G.], and this is my son, [Braden G.]. We're here tonight to support, and just and Braden, one to share his thoughts from a child that lives in the neighborhood.

Braden G. (Resident) 08:14

Um, so not just the Columbus kids, also the neighborhood kids really want this. Because my friend and I, we always come, but we're, the—we have like, um, like, his, my friend's younger siblings, they are too scared, maybe to play on like on the baseball field because they don't want skin their knees. So that's why I think we should—and also, it'd be really fun to have all the different fun equipment and to really just have a happy, like, really fun playground in this neighborhood.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 08:48

Thank you. Sandy, can I get your family's address for the record please? Just state it for the

Sandy G. (Resident) 08:58

[States their address.]

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 09:00

Thank you.

Sandy G. (Resident) 09:01

Thank you.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 09:03

And so you were speaking for the whole **[G. Family]**. All right. So we have **[Laura M.]**.

[Off microphone Laura presumably indicated she did not want to speak.]

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 09:15

Okay, thank you. Alright, so that that is the complete list of people who signed up to speak. Is there anyone else who would like to say something? Okay. All right. And again, just state your name and address.

Ellen N. (Resident) 09:32

My name is **[Ellen N.]** and I live at **[XXXXXX]**? Yeah, and Brianne invited me to come here tonight to show my support for this for this project on Columbus school. I personally don't have kids. I've lived in this neighborhood for about a year. But I see the kids who live right next door are playing outside all the time and they clearly love having the grass to play around, and I know that they would really love to have green space in this school. As you can see, we are a neighborhood who really cares about our community, and our neighborhood association is always looking for ways to better the community, not just for our neighborhood, but for the whole city. So I really hope that you all consider this proposal. Thank you.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 10:15

All right. Thank you. And thank you all for coming tonight. It's one of our later meetings. So appreciate you coming.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 10:21

Alright, so we will move on to our action items now. So our only action item is number 23-1199 the request to approve neighborhood grant program request submitted by the App—historic central neighborhood. Can I get a motion?

Alderson Nate Wolff (District 12) 10:39

Motion to approve.

Alderson Israel Del Toro (District 4) 10:39

Second.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 10:40

All right, we have a motion and a second. Who is going to give us the background? Deputy Director Kress.

Deputy Director David Kress (Community and Economic Development) 10:46

Thank you, chair. I'll just give a very high-level overview. And I'm happy to answer questions. But I think that the residents of the historic central neighborhood did a good job of outlining and explaining what's really being proposed here.

Deputy Director David Kress (Community and Economic Development) 10:58

Our team has been working closely with historic central neighborhood representatives and Appleton Area School District facilities staff for the last couple of months to work through the proposal that's before you today, which is essentially to add playground equipment and create additional green space at the Columbus elementary school site, which is located in the heart of the historic central neighborhood. For those of you that aren't aware of the boundaries—rough boundaries—of the historic central neighborhood, it's immediately north of downtown. So basically, Packard Street on the south end, Richmond Street on the west, Wisconsin on the north, and then the railroad tracks on the east or southeast end of the neighborhood. So obviously, this is an important community space already with for the neighborhood. And there's, in our view, opportunity to make these enhancements and really make it an even better place to build on those existing assets and just invest further in this neighborhood.

Deputy Director David Kress (Community and Economic Development) 11:52

It is requesting—the project is requesting funding through the neighborhood grant program. At the moment, we have just under \$80,000 available in the community development block grant or CDBG funding source through that neighborhood grant program. So the request aligns very well with the amount that we currently have available. And there are certain eligibility criteria that need to be met to utilize the CDBG dollars. Staff has reviewed it against those eligibility criteria and has found that it satisfies the necessary requirements, and we are happy to recommend approval of this item.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 12:27

Thank you. Are there any questions from committee members? Alder Del Toro.

Alderson Israel Del Toro (District 4) 12:36

Just a brief thank you to the community members who all stepped out. It's really lovely to see a community gathered and rallied around such a good use of developing green space and good use of city funds. So fully support this. As long as you don't spray any nasty chemicals on that grass, you're good to go.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 12:54

Thank you. Alder Jones.

Alderson Vaya Jones (District 10) 13:03

I've been able to work with some of the neighbors of this neighborhood group, and you're always well researched, well put together, and your intentions are amazing. So I almost feel bad asking this question. The \$80,000, is that a use it or lose it by the end of the year?

Deputy Director David Kress (Community and Economic Development) 13:19

It is not. We have seven years to spend down CDBG dollars. The funding that we're looking to allocate to this project was first set aside for the neighborhood grant program back in 2018—forty, roughly \$40,000 in 2018, and another \$40,000 in 2019. So it's not completely up against the timeline but getting closer to the point where it's one of the last remaining pieces from 2018 and 2019 funding that we're looking to spend. So it would certainly help the city from—it's called the timeliness ratio that the funding source, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development checks that on an annual basis. And so it would help us to spend on the fund—funding. But it's not strictly a use it or lose it situation. In fact, as proposed, the actual project wouldn't occur until summer of 2024, June through August of 2024. But it'll take some time to work through bidding and procurement, and if approved by Council, we would enter into a memorandum of understanding with the neighborhood and with the school district. So there's time on our side, but we want to keep the momentum going.

Alderson Vaya Jones (District 10) 14:29

For the other neighborhood groups who would be looking for grants or funding, does that come out of the same CDBG funds?

Deputy Director David Kress (Community and Economic Development) 14:37

It would. It's a competitive grant process. Like I said the current allotment of CDBG funding has been available since 2018 and 2019.

Alderson Vaya Jones (District 10) 14:47

So there's not a lot applying for that. Is that fair to say?

Deputy Director David Kress (Community and Economic Development) 14:51

That's correct. The difficult part with that funding is because of all of the eligibility criteria that come along with federal funds, finding the right project in the right location that serves a low to moderate income population, and also has a project partner—in this case, Appleton Area School District that's willing to help actually execute on the project—is difficult to get all of those things to line up. So in this case, we're really excited that it appears all the boxes have been checked and it'll work. But you're right that it would take away funding that could otherwise be used for other neighbor projects. But we haven't received any projects in recent years.

Alderson Vaya Jones (District 10) 15:25

Thank you.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 15:27

I just have one question, Deputy Director Kress, could you, just for people who might be watching or reading the minutes later, just give a brief summary of the qualifications and how this one is unique? Because the neighborhood is not necessarily a low to moderate income neighborhood overall. Can you just kind of explain how this uniquely qualifies?

Deputy Director David Kress (Community and Economic Development) 15:51

Sure. So with the CDBG, or community development block grant funding, there are several requirements that need to be met. It needs to meet a national objective. In this case, the national objective that's being met is that it's serving a low to moderate income population. So while the school site itself isn't located in low to moderate income Census Block Group, we've taken the approach to identify a service area for the site, which goes beyond obviously, just the boundaries of the school site itself. And in running the demographic data for that service area, which is the boundaries of the neighborhood, which we feel are very reasonable and adequate, that was found to be an LMI, low to moderate income service area. So it checks that box and meets that requirement from a CDBG standpoint.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 16:39

Thank you very much. Um, I personally—I walk near the school a lot. I applaud the community, the neighborhood group, for bringing this project to us. There's a lot of concrete around Columbus school, and I'm looking forward to see this finished, and I fully support it.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 17:01

Any other questions, comments? All right, hearing none, let's go ahead and vote. All those in favor, please signify by saying aye. All right. Chair votes, aye. That passes five zero.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 17:13

This will be before Council next week, on Wednesday at 7pm. So a little bit more rigorous public participation. You do need to come in and sign up and if you would like to speak then. Alright, thank you all for coming.