

CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA



Agenda Date:	March 17, 2025
Action Required:	Approval of <i>2025 ReadyKids Accessible Play</i> proposal and the appropriation of associated Community Development Block Grant funds, a Substantial Amendment, in the amount of \$50,000 (CDBG-CV & CDBG)
Presenter:	Anthony Warn, Grants Analyst
Staff Contacts:	Anthony Warn, Grants Analyst Taylor Harvey-Ryan, Grants Program Manager
Title:	Public Hearing and Resolution for the <i>2025 ReadyKids Accessible Play</i> Program, a Substantial Amendment in the Amount of \$50,000 (CDBG-CV & CDBG) (1 of 2 readings)

Background

The City of Charlottesville, Virginia ("City"), is an Entitlement Community as designated by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development ("HUD") and, as such, is the recipient of annual allocations of federal funds through the Community Development Block Grants ("CDBG") and the HOME Investment Partnerships Programs. City staff have worked closely with HUD Staff over the life of these Programs to be wise stewards of these funds and to support a wide range of impactful community development and affordable housing programs on behalf of the people of Charlottesville.

This proposal seeks to continue this work by providing financial support to one of the City's oldest youth-serving nonprofits to support their important counseling services to children in need and their caregivers.

Discussion

ReadyKids is one of the City's oldest nonprofits and provides valuable counseling and support services to youth within the greater Charlottesville area and their caregivers. ReadyKids has dedicated a great deal of their time, energy, and resources to developing a state-of-the-art facility, including through a major renovation ending in 2019 that added, among other enhancements:

- A large, welcoming waiting room with interactive play spaces and comfortable furniture for caregivers;
- Several new conference rooms for use by ReadyKids Staff (these are also made available to community partners as needed);
- Increased office space for Staff (forty-six (46) Staff at present); and
- Additional rooms for family therapy and decompression spaces.

ReadyKids has worked hard to create a welcoming environment inside the facility that is well-equipped for social distancing and has dedicated its limited resources to its core mission of providing family support, early learning opportunities, and counseling services to youth in need and their caregivers. This has left little time and few financial resources available to develop the outdoor space into a warm, welcoming and, most importantly, accessible, area for the beneficiaries of their services. Currently, ReadyKids clients have access to a partially developed outdoor space that features:

- Roughly defined walking paths;
- A small concrete slab (primarily for ingress/egress; not large enough for tables or even seating);
- Limited seating options, consisting primarily of a few older plastic tables and chairs, some donated, near the building as well as a few wooden Adirondack-style chairs on the far side of the outdoor space; and
- Limited play features including a small walking bridge and a "mud kitchen" (a space which incorporates a basic wood structure, set up similarly to a kitchen counter and sink and which encourages the use of natural elements for play and creativity).

Shortly after the onset of the COVID pandemic, ReadyKids began to explore ways of providing its clients with additional safe waiting spaces that would adhere to COVID safety principles, such as distancing and access to fresh air. ReadyKids began by connecting with Chloe Hawkins ("Hawkins") of COHORT, a local landscape architecture firm, to research and realize the potential for the outdoor space. Hawkins' portfolio includes playgrounds and outdoor spaces that center around inclusivity and accessibility for folks of all different abilities and forms of mobility. She understands the limited budget and has worked with ReadyKids Project Staff to develop a staged approach to the improvement of the outdoor space, minding the need for financial support from the City and other private fundraising efforts.

In spite of all of this work, many parents and caregivers elect to wait in their cars to limit their potential exposure to COVID and other communicable illnesses. ReadyKids desires to have a place for caregivers and family members who prefer alternative waiting areas, including a more welcoming, accessible, and inclusive outdoor space.

Building on ReadyKids' long history of serving area youth and their caregivers, and with the goal of creating an even more welcoming and accessible environment for them, Staff proposes to use funds from the City's CDBG and CDBG-CV Programs to support ReadyKids in the rehabilitation of their play-space to provide, among other enhancements:

- Newly accessible deck-area from the existing waiting room back door, which would increase accessibility to the outdoor play-space. This addition will support seating and be more accessible to participants who might have different mobility needs;
- Landscaping and grading, which would allow for more clearly defined paths and playground improvements, further increasing the accessibility and inclusiveness of the space;
- Funding for the professional services of a local architect who will help ReadyKids develop their vision and deliver construction-ready design plans, as well as assisting Staff in obtaining the required permits/approvals; and

- Additional enhancements and improvements as funding allows.

Additional Benefits

This proposal builds on the goal of HUD's CDBG-CV Grant Program to support "long-term spaces designed to reduce the transmission of future coronaviruses." (Note: The funds to be used for this Project stems entirely from private donations to ReadyKids and the proposed CDBG funding, so there is no risk of "duplication of benefits" as spelled out in HUD's CDBG-CV guidance.)

This proposal also brings with it the additional benefit of enabling ReadyKids to use awarded funds as the basis for approaching potential private and philanthropic donors to provide matching funds; thereby, leveraging City funding for an expanded impact. (This kind of leveraging of federal funds is of interest to HUD in terms of showing the impact of their funding.)

Conclusion

ReadyKids still has participants who elect to wait in their vehicles as opposed to the indoor waiting room to allow for social distancing (due to remaining concerns about COVID and other such transmissions). Financial support from the City will allow this Project to move forward and begin the work of building a more healthy option that addresses the profound needs and concerns of these caregivers and their children while receiving services.

Alignment with City Council's Vision and Strategic Plan

This proposed accessibility-focused project is closely aligned to City Council's vision of the City as a community where everyone thrives. This Project aligns with the City's Strategic Plan Framework Outcome Areas of Partnerships, Education and Recreation, Arts & Culture:

- Partnerships: This proposal strengthens the ongoing partnership between the City's Office of Community Solutions and ReadyKids Staff to remove barriers of access for its clients;
- Education: This proposal affirms Council's vision of the City being one committed to Education and supportive of the broad and well-integrated educational opportunities ReadyKids provides; and
- Recreation, Arts & Culture: This proposal strengthens the City's commitment to enhancing access to recreation and greenspace for visitors to ReadyKids, many of whom are City residents.

This proposal also complies with the City's Comprehensive Plan and the 2023-2027 Consolidated Housing and Community Development Plan.

Community Engagement

This proposal benefits from a high degree of community engagement, specifically related to the many forums and conversations the City has hosted about the need for supporting youth service programs. In addition, City Council has long reviewed the goals and objectives of the City's CDBG Program and renewed them on an annual basis at Public Hearings, in which the community is invited to provide comment and the approved resolutions consistently prioritize supporting childcare services. Finally, two (2) Public Hearings are scheduled for discussion of this proposal, during which

time members of the public are invited to provide comment prior to consideration and final approval by recorded vote of the duly elected City Council.

Budgetary Impact

As the funds proposed here are federal funds allocated to the City by HUD to support community-benefit activities, and, as such, do not draw from the City's General Fund, no adverse impacts to the City's Budget are anticipated. Rather, the use of these funds as recommended here will instead serve to address an important and pressing community need(s), while at the same time supporting the City's eligibility for allocations of entitlement funds in future years.

Recommendation

Based on the anticipated benefits of the current proposal to the Charlottesville community, City Staff recommends that City Council approve the current proposal, as well as the associated appropriation of funds within the CDBG Fund needed to fully implement the proposed Program and related enhancements. Specifically, this Project will significantly enhance the experience for children receiving services from ReadyKids and their caregivers, who will have available to them a newly accessible and COVID-safe play-space and waiting area while receiving services.

Based on the anticipated benefits of the current proposal for City children and their caregivers struggling with the impacts of COVID, City Staff recommends that Council approve the current proposal presented by the following suggested Motions:

"First, I move that City Council approve the Resolution now before us to approve the *2025 ReadyKids Accessible Play* Project. I further move that City Council appropriate Community Development Block Grant funds as needed to implement the proposal as presented here before us today."

Alternatives

Given that these funds are provided by HUD to the City for the execution of meaningful community-benefit programs and, as such, are not drawn from the City's General Fund, no alternative courses of action are considered. City Council, could, of course, decide not to provide approval for this proposal and could instead direct City Staff to explore other options for expending these funds consistent with HUD's programmatic requirements.

Attachments

1. CDBG-CV PY24+ ReadyKids Accessible Play Resolution
2. CDBG-CV PY24+ ReadyKids Accessible Play Slide Deck