

CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA



Agenda Date:	<i>May 19, 2014</i>
Action Required:	<i>None-informational</i>
Presenters:	<i>Gretchen Ellis, Human Services Planner, Megan Bird, Monique Brown, Ramsey Byrne, Jemma Fendley Zachary Greenhoe, Kibiriti Majuto, Anna Perry, Richard Potter, Sophie Pugh-Sellers, Elizabeth Stafford, Zyanha Bryant, Inigo Drake, Brianna Wilson, and Letia Wilson Charlottesville Youth Council</i>
Staff Contacts:	<i>David Ellis, Assistant City Manager and Gretchen Ellis, Human Services Planner</i>
Title:	<i>Report from the Charlottesville Youth Council</i>

Background:

In January, 2013, City Council appointed 16 members to the Charlottesville Youth Council. The members are Charlottesville High School students Megan Bird, Monique Brown, Ramsey Byrne, Zachary Greenhoe, Kibiriti Majuto, Anna Perry, Richard Potter, Sophie Pugh-Sellers, Elizabeth Stafford, and Buford Middle School students Zyanha Bryant, Inigo Drake, Brianna Wilson, and Letia Wilson. The Youth Council has met formally nine times and members have been extraordinarily engaged and enthusiastic. The Youth Council has been assisted by Areeb Khan, a third-year University of Virginia student, who was active in youth leadership when he was in high school.

Discussion:

The Youth Council focused on three areas this year. The first was bicycle and pedestrian accessibility and safety, particularly the walkability of the City. There was considerable discussion of the need for a pedestrian crossing of U.S. 29, but in the end, the Council focused on access to Charlottesville High School. They took a walking tour of the City portion of the Meadowcreek Parkway with Chris Gensic of Parks and Recreation and Amanda Poncy of Neighborhood development. A letter containing their recommendations is attached.

The second area of focus was on school funding and the City budget. They reviewed the Report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Sustainable School Funding and discussed the possible solutions. A letter with their recommendations is attached.

Finally, the Youth Council discussed public safety, particularly on the Downtown Mall. They are recommending consideration of Blue Light Phones in an attached letter.

Three members, Monique Brown, Ramsey Byrne, and Richard Potter had the opportunity to attend the National League of Cities conference in Seattle. They returned with good information and inspiration.

As Youth Council members will tell you at the May 19 meeting, they would like to have the opportunity to interact more with City Council in the coming year. Perhaps Council would consider a work session with them in the fall.

Community Engagement:

The Charlottesville Youth Council is a wonderful example of community engagement. Sixteen young people identified and studied three areas of community need, producing concrete recommendations for Council.

Alignment with City Council's Vision and Priority Areas:

The Youth Council directly addresses four of City Council's Vision Areas: A Center for Lifelong Learning, a Community of Mutual Respect, and Smart, Citizen-Focused Government. It also addresses the 2012-2014 priority: to provide comprehensive support system for children.

Budgetary Impact:

This has no impact on the General Fund.

Recommendation:

Three letters from the Youth Council with recommendations are attached.

Attachments:

Letter regarding the Blue Ribbon Commission report.
Letter regarding pedestrian and bicycle access
Letter regarding public safety

May 19, 2014

Re: City funding of public schools

Dear City Council,

The Youth Council of Charlottesville has reviewed the REPORT OF THE BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL FUNDING. We considered short and long term alternatives and solutions to the educational funding gap that the city is facing and with some deliberation the Council has found certain proposals to be more effective and promising than others.

With regard to near-term action alternatives, we believe the increase in meals tax will provide the greatest amount of additional revenue to the city while keeping prices relatively stable and maintaining a strong, local economy. Because a 1% increase in the meal tax is projected to yield another 2 million dollars in annual revenue, this solution is most promising in closing an educational funding deficit. We also believe raising the lodging tax could be beneficial.

Turning toward long-term solutions, the proposal to close an elementary school in the City of Charlottesville, while daunting, appears most effective and feasible in accomplishing the task of maintaining the outstanding quality of public education the city has to offer. Redistricting will be necessary to consolidate to five elementary schools, but the operational savings of 1.5 to 2 million dollars can allow the school district to maintain the same level of attention and quality education for all students, whether they remain at the same school or are absorbed into another.

The members of Youth Council believe the value of extraordinary public education in Charlottesville is priceless to the community and our future, and that the proposed alternatives are a small price to pay for the lasting effects of a strong and stable youth. We hope that these alternatives are taken into consideration when making difficult decisions.

Respectfully,

The Youth Council of the City of Charlottesville

May 19, 2014

Re: Pedestrian and Bike Access

Dear City Councilors,

The Charlottesville Youth Council has spent time this year discussing bicycle and pedestrian safety, particularly related to safe routes to Charlottesville High School. We recently walked the path next to the City section of the Meadowcreek Parkway with Chris Gensic of Parks and Recreation and Amanda Poncy of Neighborhood Development. We discovered the MACAA building. The Meadowcreek Parkway path is directly connected to a garden behind the MACAA building by a stone staircase. We feel that this garden would give CHS students a safe and convenient way to walk to school. If you were to buy this garden, (which includes a walkway), students wouldn't be forced to take the more dangerous route of Park Street, where the sidewalk is quite narrow. MACAA also owns a sidewalk that extends up to Park Street. We propose that you ask them for access to this; if they decline you could offer to improve it because it's currently in poor condition.

In addition to the MACAA garden, CHS students and residents of Charlottesville could benefit from having a bike lane on Melbourne Road. The lanes are about twice as big as they need to be on this road, so the extra space can be afforded. Also, the addition of this bike lane will encourage students to commute to school in a way that is better for their bodies and the environment.

We hope you will consider improving the safety and convenience in transportation of CHS students by buying the garden by the MACAA building as well as creating a bike lane on Melbourne Road. Thank you for your generosity.

Respectfully,

Charlottesville Youth Council

May 19, 2014

Re: Downtown Safety

Dear Councilors,

An idea has been proposed by the Youth Council of the City of Charlottesville to adopt the BLUE EMERGENCY PHONE LIGHT system on the Downtown Mall to enhance security. These posts connect directly to a 9-1-1 dispatcher, who can then contact the appropriate emergency service. When placed in strategic locations, these posts have proven to be a deterrent of crime, as they are a visible post of police presence. In addition, by being near to a victim of a crime, they act as a quick locator and emergency notification.

In addition, these posts are not a new addition to Charlottesville. The University of Virginia already uses these posts around grounds. On the University Police website, when discussing the system they state:

Community members are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the Blue Light Police Emergency Phones located on the University of Virginia Campus. They are identifiable by the blue light on a pedestal. Pushing the emergency phone button will connect you directly to a University Police Services Division. Once the emergency phone button is pushed, the location of the activation is automatically transmitted to the University Police. If a caller doesn't speak or can't, an officer is immediately dispatched to the phone site.

There have also been several "Blue Light" phone installed in heavily populated areas off grounds. These phones ring directly to the 911 center.

We hope that this idea is taken under consideration, and that the safety of the residents and visitors of the City of Charlottesville when visiting the Downtown Mall is addressed.

Respectfully,

The Youth Council of the City of Charlottesville