



COUNTY OF ALBEMARLE
Office of the County Executive
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Charlottesville, Virginia 22902-4596
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August 17, 2017

Mr. Matt Weaver
Community Development Associate Director
Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development
600 East Main Street, Suite 300
Richmond, VA 23219

RE: Letter of Interest to Apply for a CDBG Planning Grant toward a Community Improvement Grant for Community Service Facilities

Dear Mr. Weaver:

Albemarle County is interested in applying for a Planning Grant to identify the needs and weigh the feasibility of making capital improvements to one or two closed school sites in southern Albemarle County.

Access to community amenities is often restricted for rural Virginians. This condition is worsened when rural schools are shut down, causing a detriment to the community's quality of life through the loss of social activities, an economic base, health programs, and an educational center. With rural schools offering a variety of sizes of interior space, there is often an opportunity to adapt these spaces for the specific needs of a lower income community. A proposed strategy for planning and design options for school reuse can be demonstrated through a public participation process that would address the established rural issues and contribute to the quality of life for residents. Ideally, implemented strategies will overcome limited building resources and be a model for revitalized rural community development efforts.

There has been a growing trend of rural decline in Virginia leaving many citizens, wondering how to best survive and keep his or her community thriving. According to research, "those who live in rural places are among the poorest, least well-provided for—in terms of access to human, educational, social, and health care services—and most inadequately housed of all Americans" (Lapping, 2007). Additionally, many of these are elders with limited mobility. With so many essential services required locally by rural residents to create a moderate to high quality of life, new construction of buildings or individually housed services

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can be too expensive for a community to create and sustain. This is due in part to a limited rural workforce and tax base. Also, transportation means are very limited that provide adequate access to all the required daily services of elderly and lower income families. These problems are compounded when a rural community's school also closes its doors. When schools close, like Yancey Elementary in Esmont, Albemarle County, not only is a large source of employment suddenly gone, but so is the community's source of entertainment, health services, sense of connectedness, and social pride as well.

Yancey Elementary closed at the end of the 2017 school year after serving the Esmont community since 1960. The building is currently without an identified use or community benefit. Without an immediate positive community use, the building will likely become a community liability.

Scottsville School closed in 1967 and has since been used to provide limited senior housing and human and community services. While it has been providing community benefit, it could be expanded to meet the growing community human service needs mentioned by community members in June 2017.

A community meeting held on June 29, 2017 at Yancey Elementary in the Esmont area of Albemarle County, outside of Scottsville, identified several community needs that included pre-school learning, after school care, community college training, business incubator, programming for people with disabilities, elderly care, services and housing, and social services for families and children. Since that meetings, many non-profits and human service agencies have expressed a need for expanding services in one or both of the locations to include; Boys & Girls Club, Boy Scouts, library, food kitchen, rural health center, Senior Center and others.

Both potential sites are in the Scottsville area of Albemarle County in Census Tract 114. According to the American Community Survey of 2015, the total population in this census tract is 4,511 with a per capita income of \$29,500 and median family household income of \$55,523. This compares to the overall Albemarle County median household income of \$70,589. 13.3% of the residents live below the poverty level.

This area of Albemarle County is over a 30-minute drive to the urban area of Charlottesville where most assistance programs are provided for elderly, children and lower income families. 23% of the population is above the age of 60 with limited driving and transportation capabilities.

The Thomas Jefferson Planning District with a staff of 12 is prepared to immediately begin the needs analysis and participatory planning process. The TJPDC, since 1972, has been assisting local governments in Region 10 with planning and community development projects. The TJPDC is fully staffed to initiate this planning effort and if successful, prepared to evaluate and write a Community Services Facilities capital grant application for funding.

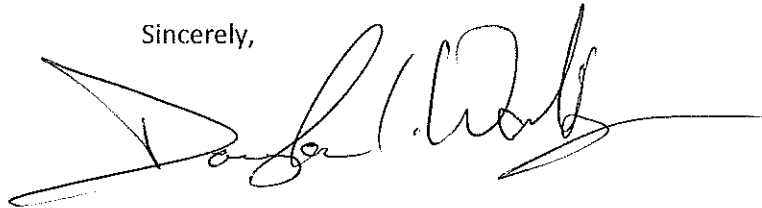
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Albemarle County government and Albemarle County Schools have already begun a community discussion to determine interests in new services for the site. A strong commitment is in place by the School District, the County and the TJPDC to pursue the redevelopment of these sites and buildings to keep these sites in productive use meeting unmet needs within these lower income rural communities.

Albemarle County is interested in applying for a Planning Grant from DHCD to identify the needs and weigh the feasibility of making capital improvements to one or two closed elementary school sites in southern Albemarle County. At this time, it is our intent to apply for a local planning grant from DHCD, but by the time of application, and from already identified interests from the nearby counties of Fluvanna, Nelson and Buckingham, this may quickly become a regional planning grant request. Discussions have already taken place with the adjoining counties of their interest to pursue a joint application. We ask your permission to pursue both the local and regional application to be determined prior to the final planning grant application.

I thank you for your consideration and either I or Chip Boyles, Executive Director of the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission, would look forward to any additional discussion or information sharing that may be needed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Douglas C. Walker", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Douglas C. Walker
Interim County Executive

DCW/dbm
17.005