

Council Agenda Report

Date: December 12, 2016

Prepared and Submitted by: Sandra Tripp-Jones, City Manager 

SUBJECT: Letter of Support for Tour Bus for Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad State Park and Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge

Discussion:

The Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad State Park is scheduled to open in March 2017. The project partners include Dorchester County Government, the National Park Service, the Maryland State Department of Natural Resources and the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the City of Cambridge. The City is part of a planning committee for the opening and as such introduced the idea of a park and ride service with historic interpretation, based in Cambridge. The National Park Service identified a grant source. The Federal Lands Access Program (Access Program) was established in 23 U.S.C. 204 to improve transportation facilities that provide access to, are adjacent to, or are located within Federal lands. The Access Program supplements State and local resources for public roads, transit systems, and other transportation facilities, with an emphasis on high-use recreation sites and economic generators. City staff has recommended that the tour bus facility be placed in the City lot on Academy Street, a lot that is not heavily used during day-time hours, especially weekends. The County is the lead agency in applying for the grant – in the amount of \$1.1 million for buses, reconfiguration of the lot to handle the buses, a building for selling tickets and providing information, and public restrooms. It does not include drivers nor maintenance costs. These will be included in a business plan and are intended to be recouped through bus tickets sales. It is intended that there be two loops: one with express service to the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad State Park and Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge a second longer loop including live narration about both parks. The City's interest is not only to promote tourism to the area but also to bring as many visitors to downtown Cambridge itself. It is currently estimated that 60,000 people per year will use the tour bus rides. A program of incentives for encouraging bus riders to shop and eat in the downtown is yet to be developed. Full implementation of the project will take at least two (2) years from award of grant.

Fiscal Impact:

There will be a cash match requirement of \$65,000. The City will provide not only the parking lot as in-kind but also \$15,000 in match to come from salary savings in the Economic Development Division budget.

DRAFT LETTER OF SUPPORT

December 12, 2016

U.S. Department of Transportation
Office of Federal Lands Highway

SUBJECT: Eastern Federal Lands Access Program Project Application

Dear Sir or Madame,

The City of Cambridge, MD is writing in support of the Project that is a partnership between the Dorchester County Government, the National Park Service, the Maryland State Department of Natural Resources and the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the City of Cambridge. The Project will provide Access to the Federal Lands in our community.

The Dorchester County Government in partnership with these agencies is embarking on an economic development project that will enhance the experience of visitors to our area by providing easy access when visiting the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Visitor Center (HATU) and the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge (BNWR).

The project is a tour bus service that will draw people to downtown Cambridge to catch the bus and take them to the HATU and BNWR. There will be a bus stop in downtown Cambridge with plenty of parking and lighting and easy access to the local businesses. This will draw thousands of people to our community where they will spend their tourism dollars. It will be a big boost to our local economy, creating jobs, tax dollars and increasing the value of the properties in the County.

We request that you approve the Federal Land Access Program (FLAP) application for Dorchester County. Thank you for the opportunity to address you.

Sincerely,

Victoria Jackson Stanley
Mayor