



Legislation Text

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Bus Pass Program for the Homeless (B)

This item is a request for the City Commission to consider and approve the proposed financial plan to provide a bus pass program for the residents of GRACE Marketplace and Dignity Village. This would include authorizing staff to participate with the Alachua County Community Transportation Coordinator in a State grant program to provide transportation services for the homeless at the same location.

At Citizen's Comment on May 5, 2016, the City Commission received a comment from Theresa Lowe, Alachua County Coalition for the Homeless and Hungry (ACCHH) Executive Director, regarding the need for interim bus services for the homeless at GRACE Marketplace and Dignity Village. The City has determined that the current Homeless Bus Pass Program is unsustainable and that the program needs to be restructured to comply with state and federal rules and regulations.

City staff had meetings with Theresa Lowe on April 18th and April 25th to discuss the restructuring of the Homeless Bus Pass Program and to seek input and feedback from ACCHH, allowing ACCHH the opportunity to develop a program to fit their needs as the primary homeless service provider. However, ACCHH did not provide any suggestions on how to restructure the program or identify priorities for a new program. As such, City staff proposed a plan to partner with the Alachua County Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC), MV Transportation, to apply for a Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged (CTD) Mobility Enhancement Grant. If awarded, this grant can provide transportation assistance for homeless individuals starting on July 1, 2016. In the interim, City staff would continue to work to identify a stop-gap measure to ensure that transportation services for the homeless would continue during the application and implementation period.

The Homeless Bus Pass Program was modeled after the current Employee Bus Pass Program, but homeless ridership has been much greater than anticipated and therefore unsustainable at the current rates. The City Commission requested staff look at an alternative approach to providing interim bus services for homeless persons between May 18th and June 30th, while the City, the CTC, and ACCHH partner to apply for the CTD Mobility Enhancement Grant. City staff recommends that the Homeless Bus Pass Program be restructured not only to comply with state and federal rules and regulations, but also to be a better fit with a new paradigm in our community that is being proposed by the local Continuum of Care (CoC) to address Rapid Rehousing and the Housing First Model.

If awarded, the grant can provide up to \$55,350 (including the required 10% local match) to allow the City provide transportation services for the homeless beginning on July 1, 2016. City staff is proposing the use of \$3,485 from the remaining General Fund dollars allocated to the Cold Night Shelter Program for FY 2016 and \$2,050 from the Gain Settlement to provide the \$5,535 in matching funds for the grant. The grant would provide funding for up to 225 monthly passes each month for ACCHH to distribute to homeless. In order to make this program viable, an agreement will need to be drafted between the CTC, ACCHH, and the City stating what each party will be responsible for in order to meet the grant requirements. The CTC has been in contact

with State officials about the grant and is confident that they will receive this funding. The grant awards are scheduled to be announced in late May or early June.

As part of the interim plan, City staff is also suggesting that the \$15,000 allocated for the Homeless Bus Pass Program be used to purchase monthly passes for ACCHH to provide bus services during the time period between the end of the current program until the implementation of the grant. Staff is estimating that approximately \$8,750 is needed to provide interim bus services for approximately 2 months beginning on May 18th. RTS will work with ACCHH to determine how the monthly bus passes will be distributed and managed. This will also provide a good opportunity to establish a new process and work out issues before the grant is implemented. The remaining fund of \$6,250 will be placed in a contingency fund to cover any potential gap if there is a delay in the awarding of the grant to the CTC.

At this time, there is no fiscal impact to the budget since these funds have already been approved by the City Commission to be used for homeless services. Staff is asking the City Commission to authorize the use \$15,000 of the Bus Pass Program fund to cover the interim period and authorize the use of surplus funding in the amount of \$3,485 from the Cold Night Shelter Program and \$2,050 from the Gain Settlement to be provided as the local matching funds for the State Mobility Enhancement grant. If there is a change to the Homeless Bus Pass Program, staff will immediately notify the City Commission of any potential impact to the budget.

At this time, there is no impact to the FY 2016 Budget. There is a surplus in the Cold Night Shelter fund in the amount of \$3,485 that could be re-allocated to the Bus Pass Program and \$2,050 is available in the Gain Settlement for homeless services, which could be used as matching funds for the grant. The City Commission had previously allocated \$15,000 for the Homeless Bus Pass Program for FY 2016.

The City Commission 1) authorize staff to use \$3,485 of surplus funds from the Cold Night Shelter Program and \$2,050 from the Gain Settlement Funds as matching funds to partner with the Alachua County Community Transportation Coordinator for the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged Mobility Enhancement Grant; 2) authorize staff to use the previously-approved FY 2016 Bus Pass Program funding of \$15,000 to fund homeless transportation services during the interim period between the end of the current program on May 18 and the beginning of the grant period on July 1, with any remaining monies to be allocated to a Bus Pass Contingency Fund if there is a need during the fiscal year; and 3) authorize the City Manager or designee to enter into an agreement for the CTD Grant Program.

Alternative Recommendation: Direct staff to return to the City Commission with other approaches for interim bus services at the next City Commission meeting of May 19, 2016.