

CITY COUNCIL MEMORANDUM

FROM: The Office of the City Manager **DATE:** May 17, 2023
SUBJECT: Consider Resolution 2023-045, authorizing support for a grant application to the Texas Department of Transportation's 2023 Transportation Alternatives (TA) Set-Aside Call for Projects and acceptance of allocated funds if awarded in an amount of up to \$500,000 with the City's match being up to \$100,000.

PRESENTER: Clayton Comstock, Director of Planning

SUMMARY:

Staff is seeking City Council's approval of a resolution supporting an application to the 2023 Transportation Alternatives (TA) Set-Aside Call for Projects for a Pedestrian Facilities Master Plan. Acceptance of the grant will require a \$100,000 match and implementation of a Pedestrian Facilities Master Plan will require a future increase in the city's budgetary investment in pedestrian facilities.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside Funding

After the passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), funding for the 2023 Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside (TA) Program was announced December 2022. Transportation Alternatives funding is intended to support infrastructure projects related to bicycle, pedestrian, and transit alternatives. For the first time, the statewide call for projects includes opportunities for funding assistance for planning projects. The call for projects has a two-step application process, and staff received positive feedback after the exploratory first step application for a city-wide Pedestrian Facilities Master Plan described in more detail below. The second, more detailed, and final application deadline is June 5, 2023. The application requires a resolution of support by the governing body sponsoring the application.

Pedestrian Facilities Master Plan

Sidewalk connectivity, accessibility, and overall pedestrian mobility have been emerging issues in North Richland Hills as the community nears build out. Residents desire a direct, safe, and complete off-street path to get to destinations such as schools, parks, trails, commercial centers, and transit. This citizen feedback was evident in the Vision2030 Strategic Plan process and in the subsequent 2021 Citizen Survey. With the input of the community, the final Vision2030 Transportation Plan adopted by City Council in July 2019



included a recommendation to create a Pedestrian Facilities Master Plan element of Vision2030.

While the 2021 Citizen Survey's open-ended "One Thing" responses were categorized into very broad topics, "sidewalks" was one of the frequently mentioned words and topics once those responses were evaluated more closely.

The purpose of a Pedestrian Facilities Master Plan is to provide a strategy for sidewalk project identification and prioritization. Sidewalk Program funding and grant funding could then be targeted to implement the plan. A general outline of a Pedestrian Facilities Master Plan for North Richland Hills would likely include:

1. General local policies and strategies for pedestrian mobility and safety. This would also better define maintenance responsibilities between public and private entities.
2. Sidewalk Plan
 - a. Existing sidewalk inventory, including sidewalk width and general condition
 - b. Primary destination designations (i.e. transit, retail/service nodes, parks/trails, schools, etc.)
 - c. Sidewalk network gap identification
 - d. Project funding estimates and prioritization
3. Safe Routes to Schools Small Area Plans for each school campus
4. Safe Routes to Transit Small Area Plans for Smithfield and Iron Horse Station areas
5. ADA Transition Plan

Planning and engineering staff have estimated the cost of a plan of this scope to be around \$500,000 when contracted out to a specialized consultant that prepares pedestrian facilities plans. The Transportation Alternatives (TA) Set-Aside funding program is an 80/20 match, where the City would be responsible for 20% of the cost of the project, or \$100,000.

A review of current funding sources identifies that \$50,000 could reasonably come from Park Impact Fees because of the connection to trails and sidewalk connections to park facilities. Another \$50,000 is available to come from the General Capital Projects Fund. Specific funding sources would be formalized if the TA Set-Aside project was awarded funding. Awards are anticipated to be announced in October 2023.

Other Considerations

Prior to City Council approving this resolution, committing FY24 dollars to this funding and grant application may also result in the following:

1. The equivalent funding would not be available in FY24 to use for other capital projects such as streets or park amenities of that same amount.

2. Creating and adopting a sidewalk or pedestrian facility master plan may create perceived commitments to install sidewalks in the various areas recommended. Expectations would need to be clearly defined in the planning document regarding the timing of sidewalk segment installations. Projects would be dependent on available funding, but would likely be based on an objective scoring/rating system to prioritize projects.
3. The City's current policy is that it is the private property owner or developer responsibility to install sidewalks. It is also the adjacent property owner's responsibility to maintain/repair sidewalks. The City does not normally install sidewalks adjacent to vacant land awaiting eventual development nor adjacent to developed property that has no sidewalks.

The city currently has a matching program where the city will match 50% of the cost of repair/replacement of sidewalks in neighborhoods or for private property owners. We currently budget \$50,000 in the program.

4. Federal and/or state grant requirements can often increase the cost of a project and/or expand the scope beyond what the local agency believes is necessary to achieve efficient and effective outcomes. Creating a Pedestrian Facilities Master Plan internally using North Richland Hills staff is a possibility, but is outside of any current work plan for Planning or Engineering staff.

Staff Recommendation

The city has received citizen input and feedback desiring to having more sidewalks and pedestrian connectivity, and this would be a follow-up implementation component of the Vision2030 Transportation Plan. However, implementation of this plan would require additional budgetary funding that is not including in proposed capital or operating budgets. Approval of this grant application indicates a commitment to increasing the City's budgetary investment in pedestrian facilities. Decisions regarding the source and level of funding will need to be made in conjunction with other budgetary priorities.

RECOMMENDATION:

Consider Resolution 2023-045 with the understanding that implementation of a Pedestrian Facilities Master Plan will require an increase in the budgetary investment in pedestrian facilities.