

# *City of Alexandria, Virginia*

## MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 31, 2009

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO # 59: CHARLES HOUSTON MORNING HOURS

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This memorandum is written in response to Councilman Smedberg's request for additional information on increasing access to the fitness facility at the Charles Houston Recreation Center by opening three hours earlier, at 6:00a.m. instead of 9:00a.m. Specifically, information is provided on associated costs, the projected demand of the service, and potential for a fee to offset the additional costs.

Currently, Recreation, Parks Cultural Activities (RPCA) only provides early morning service at the Chinquapin Recreation Center. This early opening facilitates meeting the high demand of the swim facility and is partially offset by fees charged for use of the pool and fitness center. The recently opened Charles Houston facility offers a new fitness room with various workout machines and weights. Currently, the operating hours of the Charles Houston Center do not include 6:00a.m. to 9:00a.m. morning service. If the Charles Houston Recreation Center offered morning service by adjusting its hours to open at 6:00a.m. additional personnel and non-personnel costs would be incurred. The estimated personnel cost of two staff members, one front desk attendant and one manager, working three hours is \$100 per day or \$500 per week based on a Monday through Friday schedule. In addition to the personnel costs, unknown additional utility costs would be incurred.

To more accurately gauge interest in early morning fitness center hours at Charles Houston and potential user numbers, RPCA could survey the community. This could be completed through the Department's email database and website. Depending on the survey results, the fee to offset the additional costs of providing the early morning service may be set accordingly, provided that there be enough potential users to support a realistic fee level. If the survey shows insufficient interest, then the Center would not open early. No matter the results, the proposed fee would be set to completely offset the cost of the early morning service.

To develop a preliminary estimate of early morning fitness center demand, the Chinquapin Recreation Center experience is used. The Chinquapin Recreation Center's average morning (6am-9am) fitness pass use is 33 users. Since the fitness pass at Chinquapin gives users access to a large lane pool and a fitness center, the average daily attendance may be lower at Charles Houston where only a fitness center is offered. On the other hand, it could be higher because of its location in a densely populated area.

To be conservative, if half of Chinquapin's average daily attendance is assumed (17 users) the minimum fitness center early user fee at Charles Houston would need to be \$6.00/visit to be cost neutral; this compares to the average private facility fitness center fee of \$15.00/visit. This would result in \$510 in weekly revenue which would completely offset the costs of operating for the three additional hours. However, a \$6.00/visit charge would likely be cost prohibitive for some users. If there were 34 daily users, a \$3.00/visit early use fee would need to be charged to be cost neutral. If there were 51 daily users, a \$1.50/visit user fee could be charged. Alternatively, a daily use fee could be charged no matter what hour of use, but that raises many other issues beyond the scope of this memo.

A monthly pass could also be offered. Currently, at Chinquapin a monthly pass costs \$46 per month. There are difficulties in comparing this to Charles Houston because an entrance fee to Chinquapin fitness facilities is charged no matter what time it is and an entrance fee to Charles Houston would only be charged for three hours in the morning. Depending on projected attendance numbers based on a survey, the Department estimates that a monthly pass costing anywhere between \$24 and \$46 per month could be offered as well as the daily early morning pass.