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MEMORANDUM

TO: Albemarle County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Long-Range Planning Team, Albemarle County Planning Division

DATE: December 22, 2021

RE: Best Practices and Local Project Examples – Community Member Compensation

Compensation for Working Group members is well-aligned with Albemarle County's organizational value of 'Community' and the Board's desire to integrate equity into the planning process and content for the Comprehensive Plan update. In developing the Engagement Approach and Phase 1 Schedule, Long-Range Planning staff researched local and national best practices. This document summarizes staff research for the Board's consideration.

Compensation for community expertise and time commitments is an emerging best practice in the planning and development field, as well as for equitable community engagement initiatives nationwide.^{1,2} This practice has been used as locally at the University of Virginia and the Blue Ridge Health District (Virginia Department of Health) as well as major localities throughout the Commonwealth including the City of Richmond and Arlington County. A brief description of these examples is summarized below.

University of Virginia

Locally, the University of Virginia uses stipends to compensate community members for specific projects to recognize the time of day and reimburse members for anticipated expenses, which may include childcare, meals, parking, and transportation. Flat rates for stipends are provided from the budgets of specific projects or research initiatives. University staff work to avoid potential tax implications to participants, especially those who are part of low-to-moderate household incomes.

An example is participation in the "President's Council," which focuses on strengthening the relationship between UVA and the surrounding Charlottesville/Albemarle community. Council members are offered a \$550 stipend to help offset costs of participation. The stipend is available to eligible UVA salaried staff (those who are not participating as part of their normal job duties), wage staff, and all non-UVA affiliated participants. For non-UVA participants, stipends are paid as an honorarium, and participants register as a vendor through UVA's procurement system. UVA wage and salaried staff are paid through the payroll system.

Blue Ridge Health District, Virginia Department of Health

The Blue Ridge Health District is another local entity that has compensated community members for their time and expertise contributed to a community planning initiative. For example, BRHD hired part-time workers to support data-collection and community outreach for the Community Health Assessment (MAPP2Health). These part-time staff were selected through an application process from a pool of trained community members and were paid hourly to reflect their contribution of time and the work involved.

¹ [Paying Community Members for Their Time](#), Shelterforce, by Brittany Hutson, February 26, 2021

² [Urban Wire: Community Voice is Expertise](#), Urban Institute, by Lauren Farrell, Melanie Langness, and Elsa Falkenburger, February 19, 2021

BRHD has also used gift cards and provided meals to acknowledge community members time for individual data-collection and engagement opportunities. This approach recognizes that participants who volunteer their time may have taken time away from work or incurred childcare or transportation costs. It works to avoid causing a disproportionate economic disadvantage to participants from modest household incomes.

Richmond, Virginia

The City of Richmond compensated members of key groups in recent planning processes, including RVA Green 2050³, the city's climate action planning process, and Richmond 300: A Guide for Growth, a city-wide Master Plan that aims to prioritize equitable and sustainable growth over the next 20 years.

RVA Green 2050

RVA Green 2050 is the City of Richmond's equity-center climate action and resilience planning initiative that included a group of "Roundtable" members whose role was to help the City center equity in the planning process, elevate frontline community voices, inform and guide the planning process, provide recommendations, and serve as liaisons to ensure community needs and assets were integrated into the process. The Office of Sustainability provided optional grants to Roundtable members at a variety of levels, ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000. Grant amounts were determined based on the level of commitment and whether the individual was a resident working independently of a paid position (such as with a local organization) or participated as a representative for a community-based organization. This is designed to reflect the level of commitment and offer the highest amounts to those who need it most.

Richmond 300: A Guide for Growth

Richmond 300's planning process included an advisory council, created with the goal of reaching people beyond those who typically showed up to planning commission meetings. Their initial call for volunteers to apply to be on the advisory council offers a helpful lesson for Albemarle County's planning process. The initial July 2017 call for residents to apply did not include compensation for members time and commitment. Maritza Pechin, deputy director for the city of Richmond, describes the initial approach as a "silly mistake" because "traditionally, underrepresented people who want to volunteer don't necessarily have the ability to put in substantial time without being compensated." City staff adjusted their approach and designed an approach for an engagement team that would work 5 to 15 hours per week, depending on the phase in the process, and would be compensated for their time. This pivot in their engagement process was also paired with an application that identified specific communities that had been underrepresented in their planning processes and people who could demonstrate community engagement experience and ability to reach specific communities.⁴ Over 170 people expressed interest in applying for the advisory council after the mayor's press conference sharing the opportunity. The final advisory committee resulted in 21 people varying in age, planning knowledge, and length of city residency. This set the stage for an inclusive and transparent process with understandable and accessible content. Richmond 300 won the 2021 Daniel Burnham Award for a Comprehensive Plan from the American Planning Association.⁵

Arlington County, Virginia

Arlington County, Virginia recently allocated \$50,000 of its American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding in Fiscal Year 2022 to "Equitable Engagement" with the goal of improving engagement with and representation in civic structures of historically underserved communities.⁶ These funds will be used for a pilot program to explore different ways to make it easier for underrepresented community members to participate in engagement processes through compensation. This exploration of compensation may include gift cards, childcare, and waived transportation costs. Arlington County intends to collect data on whether these practices increase the diversity of those who participate in government processes. This budget allocation followed feedback themes from Arlington County's recent "Dialogues on Race and Equity". These discussions surfaced that

³ <https://www.rva.gov/sustainability/rvagreen-2050-planning-process>

⁴ [Paying Community Members for Their Time](#), Shelterforce, by Brittany Hutson, February 26, 2021

⁵ <https://www.planning.org/awards/2021/excellence/richmond-300/>

⁶ [Adoption of recommendations for the allocation of American Rescue Plan Act \(ARPA\) funds](#), Arlington County, Virginia, November 13, 2021

the County's existing structures for decisions and public input are "narrow, advantage dominant perspectives, and do not offer access or representation for communities of color to County government leadership".⁷

Next Steps

This memo highlights local and regional examples of compensating community members as a method to integrate equity into a planning or policymaking process. If the Board is supportive of compensating Working Group members, County staff will collaborate with Human Resources and Finance staff to determine the most appropriate payment structure and process to distribute funds. County staff will continue to use the ample resources (cited above and others) available to inform this approach.