

Lewis and Clark Exploratory Center

Report and Request to the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors November 1, 2017

The Lewis and Clark Exploratory Center sits where the Darden Towe Park and the Rivanna River meet. Our mission is inspired by, but not solely focused on, the 19th Century Lewis and Clark Expedition which uniquely is rooted here. We teach and encourage the skills of exploration, on land and river, for children and adults. Visitors from the West and local school groups, alike, enjoy our small museum and our wide-ranging programs. Lists and descriptions of our activities are attached as Note 1. Note #2 is a description of the building and its uses, written by its architects.

The Center has a singular relationship to Albemarle County government that other worthy non-profits do not have. You basically own us, use us at reduced or no fee, and your citizens take advantage of a permanent, valuable asset we have built. (Darden Towe Park improvements are owned by County and City. Only 5 of the 30+ parking spaces are reserved for LCEC.)

History of the loan: LCEC built a road and parking lot, to VDOT standards, to allow public access to the 17 acres we lease for \$10/year. They were part of a \$1.7 million project, which included a 15% contingency, covered by federal/state VDOT Enhancement grant and LCEC fund-raising. In 2013, parking-lot contractors ran into substantial rock that pre-construction testing missed. The building had already been recessed into the earth, so blasting was not a viable alternative to expensive drilling and digging. Facing this unexpected removal cost, LCEC turned to the City and County. We had neither asked for nor been given any County funding since 1996 when the Lewis and Clark project began. As a partner in a Project Agreement with VDOT's Enhancement grant for the complete project, the County also could have been in a difficult place if the project were not completed. Officials advised us that the best way to proceed, given the timing, was to have City and County each forward \$130,000 to the project.

The EDA handles this assistance, and we appreciate both their guidance and, also, the strange position this has put them into as LCEC is a non-profit: not the usual business with which they deal. Like most non-profits, LCEC meets its operational needs largely through acquiring

donations and grants, which in turn depend on meeting the interests and requirements of the donors with creative programming. Note 3 lists donations. These funds are for specific purposes, almost never fungible. Through membership in the Center for Non-Profit Excellence, despite many efforts, we have yet to find one that is interested in repaying a local government grant for already-completed construction — especially when local government ultimately owns the asset.

By agreement, we make two quarterly repayments for loans' principles: \$625 to the EDA and \$707 to the brother of a board member. No payments go to the City. Grants and donations are augmented by group reservations, building rental (our first wedding event is this month) and drop-in visitors (See Executive Director's Report, Note 4) While the latter may increase, since August 12 it has fallen to zero for out-of-town visits. We are devising ways to stretch our 1-person staff (an audio tour, self-guiding projects, UVA and other volunteers). We have joined other Lewis and Clark groups to invite history buffs nationally. Our real value to tourism is extending families' time spent here, and thus local hotels' income, etc.

Our request: Since the 2013 Board of Supervisor's \$130,000 transaction went entirely to pay for a public asset to the Darden Towe Park, and its value to the public has been proven by constant public use, and, furthermore, its value has been multiplied by the accompanying LEED-designed building, LCEC programs, additional trails, handicapped access, boats, etc. created by LCEC, community donors and volunteers, and since assets in Darden Towe Park are owned by the County and City such that **the road and parking area belong to the County**, as, in fact, does the building and other improvements if LCEC reneges on its lease agreement with the County,

we request that the **Board of Supervisors recognize the fact that the \$130,000 purchased a valuable public asset and no longer require LCEC to make payments for that asset.** The EDA was used as the pass-through for the County's 2013 General Fund action which could be closed out by the Board of Supervisors. With the City's offer to "forgive" its loan, the value of the County's \$130,000 effectively is doubled.

If the Board would like further analysis of the use and value of the parking lot and road and the accompanying LCEC, it might be appropriate to ask the Darden Towe Memorial Park Committee to comment.