



## Recommendation for Action

---

**File #:** 21-1844, **Agenda Item #:** 21.

6/10/2021

---

### **Posting Language**

Approve the adoption of the George Washington Carver Museum, Cultural and Genealogy Center Facility Expansion Plan.

### **Lead Department**

Parks and Recreation Department.

### **Fiscal Note**

This item has no fiscal impact.

### **Prior Council Action:**

September 19, 2019 - Council approved negotiation and execution of a professional services agreement with Smith & Company Architects to provide Vision Planning Services for the George Washington Carver Museum, Cultural and Genealogy Center on Council Member Alter's motion, Mayor Pro Tem Garza's second on an 11-0 vote.

### **For More Information:**

Ricardo Soliz, Park Planning Division Manager, 512-974-9452; Gregory Montes, Park Planning Program Manager, 512-974-9458; Sammi Curless, Business Process Specialist, 512-974-6716.

### **Council Committee, Boards and Commission Action:**

April 6, 2021 - African American Resource Advisory Commission received an update on the Carver Expansion project and the Commission proposed a written recommendation that will speak to the urgency and priority needed for this expansion effort.

April 26, 2021 - Approved by the Library Commission to recommend the adoption of the George Washington Carver Museum, Cultural & Genealogy Center Facility Expansion Plan on an 8-0 vote with Commission Member Ramos absent.

April 26, 2021 - Design Commission received a briefing and took no action on a recommendation.

April 27, 2021 - Approved by the Parks and Recreation Board to recommend the adoption of the George Washington Carver Museum, Cultural & Genealogy Center Facility Expansion Plan on a 9-0 vote with Board Members Farasat and Morgan absent.

May 17, 2021 - Arts Commission received a briefing and took no action on a recommendation.

### **Additional Backup Information:**

The roots of the George Washington Carver Museum, Cultural and Genealogy Center were established during the early 20th Century. Austin's first public library was moved in 1933 to an area of Austin east of IH-35, populated by economically disadvantaged and minority citizens. This building would become the City's first "colored" library, serving as a central gathering place for the African American community. A larger library was

---

constructed to better serve the densely populated area in 1980.

The year 1998 brought huge change with the passage of a bond to build a "state of the art" complex that includes galleries for exhibitions, a Collections facility, classroom space and a theater adjacent to the historic Carver library. This new complex opened its doors in 2005 and has since seen the successful completion of several core exhibits, as well as hosted many performances, workshops, and family programs. Today, the Museum's Collection has over 8,000 items of artistic and historical significance.

In 2000, a Feasibility Study for the Expansion of the George Washington Carver Museum & Cultural Center was conducted and a three-phase building program was developed. Of the three proposed phases, phase one has been implemented while phases two and three have not been addressed. Phase one was completed in 2005 and included the development of a lobby with reception area, lecture hall/theater, classrooms, dance studio, dark room, conference room, commercial kitchen, storage, outdoor plazas and expanded parking.

Through our planning process, the goal for the City and community was to revisit the improvements that were proposed previously for phases two and three and develop a new plan that is in line with current needs and desires. The objective of this project is to develop a facility expansion plan update that takes into consideration the site's current usage and changes to the surrounding area. Extensive public engagement has helped inform the planning, design and development of a facility that reflects community sentiment.

Smith and Company, an architectural firm, was selected through the Request for Qualifications process to develop an expansion plan and was procured in January 2020. The community engagement for the expansion plan started in May 2020 with small group meetings that included different cultural and art groups, black civic leadership groups, Carver advocates, and Carver staff. Overall, the community engagement process continued through November 2020 and included three community-wide meetings, two online surveys and eight small group meetings.

Through community engagement, the planning team developed the following five goals and principles upon which the vision plan is based: 1) Recognize, respect and reflect the community's history, culture and heritage; 2) As the heart of Black art and culture in Austin, the plan should advance the vision and mission of the Carver Museum; 3) Establish stronger outdoor amenities that connect with nature; 4) Strengthen the diverse and inter-generational experiences in and around the facility, while meeting present and future needs of the community and staff; and 5) Create flexible spaces that could be used by everyone in the community.

The draft expansion concept was completed in November 2020 and is reflective of the community desires as understood through the comprehensive community engagement process that took place between May and November 2020. The Carver Facility Expansion Plan proposes the site to nearly triple in size overall. Outdoor programming would include outdoor classrooms, event lawn and pavilion, a community garden, restroom amenities and a new parking structure. The addition of some of these outdoor amenities will require the relocation of the existing Juneteenth Sculpture Walk. Parks and Recreation Department staff recommends discussing a new location for the existing sculptures and walk during the implementation process as a separate engagement opportunity. Indoor programming would add an additional 60,000 sq. ft. of programming space, such as expanded gallery space, education classrooms and studios, theater performance space, indoor event and ballroom space, and administration office space.

The plan will serve as a guide to develop and manage the proposed expansion in order to provide maximum cultural and recreational benefits to the community in a thoughtful and sustainable manner.

Funding for the Carver Facility Expansion Plan comes from two sources. Council appropriated a \$300,000 line-item for a new Carver Plan in the Fiscal Year 2019 Operating Budget. Additional funding for the Plan came from the 2018 Bond Proposition B, which set aside specific funding for the Carver Museum.

**Strategic Outcome(s):**

Health and Environment; Culture and Lifelong Learning.