

Information Item

Date: May 13, 2024

To: Mayor, Mayor Pro Tempore, and Members of the City Council

From: Ben Rowe, Assistant City Manager

Subject:

Update on Use of City Contribution to Smart Start of Forsyth County for Pre-K Initiatives

Strategic Focus Area: Economic Vitality and Diversity

Strategic Objective: NA

Strategic Plan Action Item: Yes

Key Work Item: Yes



In January 2023, the Mayor and City Council authorized a contribution of \$350,000 in City ARPA funds to Smart Start of Forsyth County for Pre-K initiatives. The City's contribution will support a two-year cohort project developed by the Pre-K Priority coalition with an initial focus on improving the quality of Pre-K programs in Forsyth County. The project includes thirty Pre-K classrooms across the following sites: four WS/FCS classrooms, four Head Start classrooms, eight North Carolina Pre-K classrooms in community sites, and 14 private/independent classrooms. The project will impact 540 Pre-K students and their families, as well as 60 Pre-K educators. Smart Start of Forsyth County serves as the administering agency for the City's funds. The Forsyth County Board of Commissioners provided a grant of \$3.7 million for this project.

At the Community Development/Housing/General Government Committee's April meeting, staff from Smart Start of Forsyth County will provide an update on the two-year cohort project. The staff has requested an extension from December 31, 2024 to December 31, 2025 due to unexpected delays with the project. The project initially was set to begin implementation in October 2022; however, due to extended negotiations, full ratification of the grant contract was delayed several months into spring 2023. As a result, several months of forecasted services and expenditures were not realized, therefore resulting in unspent ARPA funds. Under the City's agreement with Smart Start of Forsyth County, an initial disbursement of \$175,000 was provided upon execution of the agreement. The remaining funds will be disbursed at the end of this fiscal year after receipt of a report from Smart Start of Forsyth County on the progress of the project. Extension of the City's ARPA funds into 2025 would enable Smart Start of Forsyth County and its partners the time needed to provide much needed services and capture two years of data, as originally intended, that will demonstrate the capabilities of the project's local resources when mobilized but also show through evaluation results the need to expand the model beyond two years.