

MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL COMMUNICATION

DATE: August 20, 2024

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Melinda Moritz, Public Works Director

THROUGH: Crystal Caldera, Ph.D., City Manager

SUBJECT: Presentation, Discussion, and Possible Action to Consider Accepting a Grant, From the Channing's Joy Foundation, for the Construction and Installation of Communication Boards in All City Parks

SPONSOR(S): N/A

PURPOSE

This M & C is to consider accepting a grant from the Channing's Joy Foundation for the construction and installation of communication boards at all city parks (www.channingsjoy.com).

BACKGROUND

The city received a request from resident Jessica Manley to consider accepting a grant from the Channing's Joy Foundation to install a communication board at Raymond Rimkus Park, so that parents of autistic and other nonverbal persons could have an easier time communicating while at the playgrounds. After some discussion, staff asked if the Foundation would consider installing these boards at all city park facilities. After consideration, the Foundation agreed.

What Are Communication Boards?

Communication boards are typically made of an all-weather sign with wood or metal posts affixed low to the ground, depicting customizable symbols such as a slide, a merry go round, characters in different forms of action, etc., with an explanation of how to use the board. They are geared towards nonverbal children and other persons, specifically for those on the autism spectrum, to aid in communications between the nonverbal person and their caregiver. Ms. Manley is willing to donate her time to customize the sign symbols for each park's play activities.

Who and what is the Channing's Joy Foundation?

From their website:

"The Channing's Joy Foundation was founded in 2022 by Channing's mama, Lauren. The

foundation is run solely by Lauren (with the help of her husband, Chad) and is dedicated to promoting inclusion and acceptance of autism and all individuals with special needs. Channing, the foundation's namesake, was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder in 2018. All proceeds collected by the foundation go to support families of children with special needs and/or organizations whose mission is to promote inclusion."

According to the Centers for Disease Control, in the United States, one in 36 children have autism, up from a previous rate of one in 44. One in 45 adults also has autism. Further statistics indicate that four in 100 are boys and one in 100 are girls. Boys are nearly four times more likely to be diagnosed with autism than girls.

A child or adult with autism spectrum disorder may have problems with social interaction and communication skills, such as failing to respond to his or her name or appears not to hear at times, seems to prefer playing alone, doesn't speak or has delayed speech, or loses the previous ability to say words or sentences, can't start a conversation or keep one going, or only starts one to make requests or label items, speaks with an abnormal tone or rhythm and may use a singsong voice or robot-like speech, and repeats words or phrases verbatim, without knowing the meaning.

These boards make communication less stressful, as the nonverbal person need only point to a symbol to communicate their feelings, thoughts, or needs to the caregiver. The boards have an explanation on one side to let others know how to use them. They will also be useful for children aged two to four that may not have total command of a language and may even become a game play feature on their own.

Leon Valley would be the first city in Bexar County to include these boards in public playground areas and would further the goal of having all-inclusive playgrounds.

FISCAL IMPACT

The Channing's Joy Foundation is donating the boards, including installation, to the city. Public Works Crews will have to maintain them, but they are all-weather commercial grade signs and should last for years.

Parents of persons with disabilities pay property and sales taxes that are used to support the city's parks system, and the inclusion of these boards will assist their nonverbal children in using the park equipment and property that the parents helped fund.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends accepting the grant.

APPROVED : _____

DISAPPROVED: _____

APPROVED WITH THE FOLLOWING AMENDMENTS :

ATTEST :

SAUNDRA PASSAILAIGUE, TRMC
City Secretary