



CITY OF NORMAN, OK STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 10/28/2025

REQUESTER: Taylor Johnson, AICP, Transit and Parking Program Manager

PRESENTER: Scott Sturtz, P. E., Public Works Director

ITEM TITLE: CONSIDERATION OF ADOPTION, REJECTION, AMENDMENT, AND/OR POSTPONEMENT OF RESOLUTION R-2526-71: A RESOLUTION OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORMAN, OKLAHOMA, REQUESTING THE TOBACCO SETTLEMENT ENDOWMENT TRUST (TSET) CONSIDER THE CITY OF NORMAN'S SELECTED PROJECT FOR THE TARGETED ACHIEVEMENT GRANT: PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FUNDS FOR A PILOT EMBARK WELL TRANSIT PROGRAM.

BACKGROUND:

Between 1994 and 1998, Attorneys General from all fifty U.S. States, including Oklahoma in 1996, had filed various lawsuits against the major manufacturers of tobacco products for predatory marketing and egregious efforts to normalize smoking despite known health risks. Due to the nationwide nature of the suit a 'global settlement agreement' was proposed and resulted in the Master Settlement Agreement encompassing all but four states (Mississippi, Florida, Texas, and Minnesota) which had reached individual settlements prior to the adoption of the Master Settlement Agreement.

As part of the Master Settlement Agreement, states receive an annual payment from the tobacco industry as long as cigarettes are sold nationally. After bipartisan support for legislation to create a state question to amend the Oklahoma Constitution, voters in 2000 approved the creation of the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust, making Oklahoma the first state to protect its Master Settlement Agreement payments in a constitutional trust.

Seventy-five percent of each annual payment is deposited in the trust. Only the earnings are used each year, preserving the fund to provide grants and programs that improve health for generations to come. Each evidence-based initiative is designed to fight Oklahoma's two leading causes of preventable death - cancer and cardiovascular disease - by promoting healthy eating, physical activity and tobacco free lifestyles.

TSET Targeted Achievement Grants (TAG) programs strengthen local efforts to create healthier environments. Grants support evidence-based strategies that help communities increase access to physical activity, improve healthy food options and prevent youth tobacco use. TAG - Physical Activity grants are specifically aimed at supporting community-based group programs that encourage movement across all ages including fitness classes and recreation programs.

Norman's Adult Wellness and Education Center (AWE) was developed and constructed as part of the Norman Forward Quality of Life Initiative and opened on November 13, 2023. The goal of the AWE Center is to embody and provide programs under one roof, to improve the quality of life for all adults over 50 in the Norman community. A few of the programs include private training, group exercise classes, pickleball, drawing and painting, hand-built pottery, glazing pre-fired pottery, mixed media, floral design, healthy cooking class from beginner to advanced, and more. In addition to programs, there are events, such as movie nights, festivals, and seminars.

DISCUSSION:

Staff have received considerable feedback from transit riders and other members of the Norman senior community regarding public transportation to Norman's Adult Wellness and Education Center (AWE). After researching and discussing possible solutions with Council's Community Planning and Transportation Committee in June and August, staff suggested a pilot program for senior-focused transit service to specific health and wellness destinations here in Norman. The pilot program would be modeled and branded after the "EMBARK Well" program started by EMBARK in Oklahoma City in 2019, which seeks to help senior residents who struggle to access health and wellness services due to transportation challenges.

The suggested pilot program would be limited to one hundred seniors, 60 years of age and older, and would require those interested to fill out an application. The service would be available from 7am to 7pm on weekdays to four pre-determined locations: the Adult Wellness & Education Center, the Norman YMCA, the Cleveland County Wellness Center, and the Norman Regional Health Club. The pilot program would provide a maximum of three trips per week at no cost to the participants, which would need to be reserved one business day in advance, and would include round-trip transportation from the qualifying senior's residence to the closest wellness center for each trip. Please note that this is the current, proposed parameters of the pilot program and could be adjusted based on the grant, cost of the service provided, and other factors.

The annual cost of a pilot program as described above has been estimated at \$100,000, and staff are seeking TSET TAG Physical Activity grant funding for a three year pilot program in a total amount of \$300,000. The program does not require local match funding, but does consider local matching funds in the application approval process. Staff are not recommending any local matching funds at this time.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of Resolution R-2526-71 requesting TSET grant funding for a pilot EMBARK Well transit program in Norman.