Staff Report

Lease Agreement with Taste Project – 200 North Cooper Street
City Council Meeting Date: 08-02-2022  Document Being Considered: Resolution

RECOMMENDATION
Approve a resolution authorizing the City Manager or his designee to execute a ten-year lease agreement with Taste Project, a Texas nonprofit corporation, for a restaurant designed to provide food security for residents of Arlington and Tarrant County, including students at the University of Texas at Arlington, whose nutritional needs are not being fully met by traditional government programs, to be located at 200 North Cooper Street, Arlington, Texas, 76012.

PRIOR BOARD OR COUNCIL ACTION
None.

ANALYSIS
Taste Project desires to create a pay-what-you-can afford restaurant to provide healthy nutritious food through its nonprofit model. The building located at 200 North Cooper Street is located in a USDA food desert where a significant number of residents are low income and do not have adequate access to healthy nutritious food.

In Tarrant County, 13 percent of the residents are food insecure, of which 40 percent live above the federal poverty line and do not qualify for traditional government programs like SNAP. Ninety percent of the hungry are not homeless but have at least one working adult in the household. In addition, 41 percent of college students are food insecure. The University of Texas at Arlington is less than one mile from 200 North Cooper Street, with more than 10,000 students living on or adjacent to campus. While the university has taken steps to address some of the food insecurity issues on campus, the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities cites “more discrete and innovative food campaigns and initiatives are still needed to increase outreach”.

Currently, Taste Project has a community restaurant in Fort Worth which is a full-service restaurant. The menu has no prices and guests can do one of the following: (1) pay what you can afford, (2) pay what you would typically pay, or (3) pay what you would typically pay, plus a little extra to help a neighbor in need. In addition to the pay-what-you-can meal program, Taste Project also provides a culinary training program with graduates receiving a $15/hour average placement. They also do a farm/garden program.

Taste Project proposes to lease a portion of the City building at 200 North Cooper Street (approximately 13,000 square feet), which was originally a Water Department building and was most recently used as the Central Library Express during construction of the George Hawkes Downtown Library. The lease agreement is for 10 years, with two 5-year options to renew. All renovation costs will be paid by Taste Project.

The lease agreement would provide for the renovation of a City facility, the creation of a 100+ seat full service restaurant, production kitchen, culinary classroom, headquarter office for Taste Project, and possible future hydroponic garden. Improvements would also include façade and landscaping improvements to align with the City of Arlington’s revitalization plan and culture. Improvements are estimated at $1,000,000+ and are contingent on architectural design and construction costs.
FINANCIAL IMPACT
No financial impact is anticipated to the general fund.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
Attachments: Resolution
             Lease Agreement
Under separate cover: None
Available in the City Secretary’s Office None

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