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Alexandria seeks funds to fight obesity

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By: [Examiner Staff Writer](#) 10/07/10 11:00 PM

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Alexandria is trying to secure \$90,000 to help fight childhood obesity and officials said they'd use the money to make minor upgrades to playground equipment and to encourage urban gardening, but that the new play areas that the city's parents said are needed to help their children slim down will have to wait.

The city has applied to Kaiser Permanente for the funding. It intends to use the money to hire a consultant to assess the city's playgrounds and to work with the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority to promote urban gardening.

About 43 percent of Alexandria children between the ages of 2 and 5 are either overweight or obese, according to an Inova Health Systems study. About 25 percent of all Virginia residents are considered obese, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"There's this potential that the next generation could actually have a shorter life span than the current generations that are older, and that would be a first in human history," said Dr. Stephen Haering, Alexandria's health director.

Alexandria used an earlier grant from the health care company to gather suggestions from parents and child care providers on ways the city could help their children stay healthy. New playgrounds that were safer and easily accessible topped their list.

"Parents were saying that they wanted more places to play," said Carrie Fesperman Redden of the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria, the firm overseeing the initiative for Alexandria. "Some of them had concerns about the safety of the playgrounds where they lived, and a lot of them talked about wanting some indoor play spaces as well."

But those projects, city officials said, will have to wait until the planned assessment of the existing playgrounds is completed.

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