From the Washington Business Journal:
https://www.bizjournals.com/washington/news/2026/04/09/national-harbor-sphere-prince-georges-bill.html

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Commercial Real Estate

Prince George's is fast-tracking the National Harbor mini Sphere. Here's how it will come together.

Sphere Entertainment plans a mini version of the Las Vegas Sphere at National Harbor. Prince George's County aims to get it entitled by the end of the year.
SPHERE ENTERTAINMENT

By Janani Jana – Staff Reporter, Washington Business Journal
Apr 9, 2026 **Updated** Apr 9, 2026 7:19pm EDT

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Story Highlights

- Prince George's County is fast-tracking a 6,000-seat Sphere entertainment venue north of MGM National Harbor.
- Maryland lawmakers must approve HB1247 to allow $130 million in tax-increment financing bonds for the project.
- The bill has already passed the House and is now awaiting state Senate action.

The prospect of a Maryland Sphere did not exist in the public consciousness three months ago.

And while local governments aren't exactly known for speeding developments along, Prince George's County already has a plan to fast-track the 6,000-seat National Harbor version of the Las Vegas Sphere, get it through the entitlement process by the end of the year and break ground in late 2027.

The project, to be located due north of the MGM National Harbor casino, needs Maryland lawmakers to approve a special tax district; $198.5 million in coordinated incentives from the county, state and the governor's office; and the creation of county legislation covering development and financing. There is still no formalized deal with Sphere Entertainment Co., only a framework.

Still, the county estimates that the mini Sphere will generate $63 million in annual tax revenue. The development is projected to generate $1.3 billion in annual economic impact for the county and $200 million for the state by 2032, per an analysis from consulting firm EY. Construction is expected to generate $1.6 billion in economic impact to the county and create 3,350 direct and indirect jobs, the report estimates.

Here's what the development process for one of the largest economic development projects in Prince George's County history looks like:

A $130 million local TIF, plus

First up, state lawmakers must get behind one of the key financing mechanisms for the project.

The biggest chunk of the $198.5 million incentive package that helped to lure developer Sphere to Maryland is the county's contribution of $130 million in tax-increment financing (TIF) bonds. TIFs are essentially bonds backed by the future tax revenue that a development generates.

But the existing Maryland laws around TIFs do not allow for those bonds to directly support a project like the Sphere, Tracy Benjamin, Prince George's County deputy chief administrative officer, told me. Currently, TIF bonds are largely restricted to financing infrastructure needs such as roads and utilities.

This is where HB1247, approved by the Maryland House and currently before the Senate subcommittee on budget and taxation, comes in. The bill expands bond uses to the acquisition, construction or rehabilitation of an "immersive entertainment venue located within an extraordinary development district."

An immersive entertainment venue is defined in the legislation as a privately owned facility with 4D displays, spherical LED screens, a seating capacity of at least 3,000 and an aggregate development cost of at least $500 million.

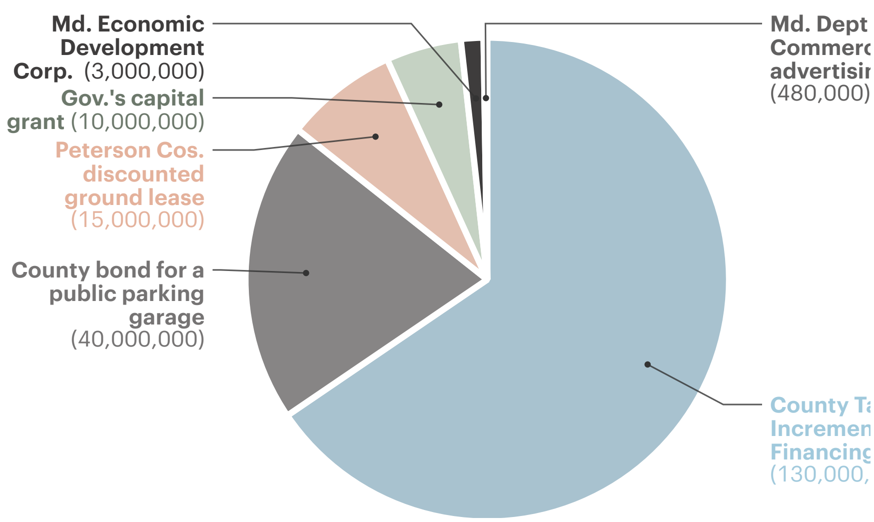
In other words, the mini Sphere, and the Sphere alone.

If the bill clears the General Assembly by the end of the legislative session on April 13, it will head to Gov. Wes Moore's desk for approval. The bill would authorize Prince George's to issue TIF bonds for use on the Sphere, and allow the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission to pledge specified tax revenue as security for bonds.

Separately, the county is expected to contribute an additional $40 million in revenue bonds for a parking garage, which would be paid back from future parking fees. It has not yet been determined whether the garage will be a public or private effort, Benjamin said.

NATIONAL HARBOR SPHERE'S INCENTIVES

Almost $200 million is expected to flow from local, state and private sources



This is not the first time that Prince George's would issue bonds to support local projects, though it's unclear how many were TIFs.

The National Harbor project – the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center and the Peterson Cos. overall National Harbor development – was partly aided by four bond issuances, totaling about $219 million, between 2005 and 2022, according to the county's 2025 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report. The county has also bond-backed Woodmore Towne Centre, Woodview Village, Victoria Falls, Brandywine Shopping Center, Prince George's Town Center at Camp Springs and the Westphalia Town Center, among others.

A $10 million state grant, plus

The financial incentives to the developer also include a $10 million capital grant found in Moore's fiscal 2027 budget. The governor signed the adopted budget Wednesday.

Buried in the spending plan is the $10 million grant designated for a "major sports and entertainment event."

"This is a revolutionary move," Moore said of the Sphere in January. "It's not just going to be thousands of jobs in construction, and thousands of jobs once completed. It's something that is going to offer a world-class destination and generate $1 billion in economic impact."

The proposed Sphere would be located on land adjacent to MGM National Harbor.

SPHERE ENTERTAINMENT AND PETERSON COMPANIES

The Maryland Economic Development Corp. will contribute $3 million through its financial incentive programs and the Department of Commerce's marketing and tourism budget will provide $480,000 in advertising grants.

National Harbor developer and owner Peterson Cos. is also expected to contribute $15 million through a discounted ground lease.

The full-size Sphere in Las Vegas was the top grossing concert venue in the world in 2024, according to Billboard, grossing $420.5 million from 1.3 million tickets sold. Another large-scale Sphere is planned for Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates.

A fast entitlement

The county's work will begin in earnest once the TIF bill clears the General Assembly, Benjamin said.

First, the County Council will introduce legislation to create the "extraordinary development district," as allowed by the passage of the state bill.

As this effort plays out, the county and Sphere Entertainment will put the final touches on the development agreement, which will need to be approved by the council.

Sphere will be expected to develop and submit its schedule of programming and the design plans for the entertainment venue. The developer did not respond to requests for comment.

Once the development district is created, the Park and Planning Commission would need to enter into a pledge agreement with the county setting the TIF increment. Authorizing the TIF issuance would mark the last piece of local legislation.

To ensure the county-level coordination, County Executive Aisha Braveboy's administration has created a steering committee that is meeting on a weekly basis. Within that committee are subcommittees for financing and TIF, permits and planning, project tracking and communications, Benjamin said.

The project is also on a special permitting track, referred to as rapid-response permitting.

"We're doing everything we can to make sure that once the legislation passes," Benjamin said, "we can hit the ground running."

CHICAGO'S ETHNIC GROCERY STORES STRUGGLE TO KEEP PRICES DOWN

Most import specialty products like spices and grains from countries subject to double-digit tariffs from Trump's trade war

BY JANANI JANA
For the Sun-Times

A 10-pack of the popular instant noodle brand Shin Ramyun is $10.99 at 88 Marketplace, an Asian supermarket in the Lower West Side near Chinatown. But the South Korean ramen brand's prices could soon increase, as President Donald Trump's trade war wages on.

Jan Zhu, store manager at 88 Marketplace, said the recent 15% import tariffs on South Korean products will make it harder for the grocer to keep prices down.

While the store is absorbing some of the price increases, Zhu said it has still been forced to pass along some cost hikes to customers.

Trump has pushed for tariffs as a way to boost U.S. manufacturing and force countries like Mexico and China to curb the flow of illegal drugs and migrants into the U.S. This year, he's announced tariffs on nearly every country at rates ranging from 10% to as much as 50%.

The taxes have hit a number of consumer products from cars to toys, but particularly food such as tea, tree nuts, spices and rice. The U.S. imported 1.4 million metric tons of rice from around the world in 2024. Of this, Thailand, which faces 19% tariffs, and India are top suppliers to the U.S., followed by China, Pakistan and Vietnam, according to data from the World Bank.

Tariffs are hitting Chicago's ethnic and international grocery stores particularly hard because most of their products are imported. And often, these items, like grains, spices or herbs, are not easily sourced in the U.S.

"It is a total mess right now," Waseem Hashlamoun, manager of Dukan International Food Market in Albany Park, said. "We support products that are made in the U.S., but it takes time to build the supply of merchandise."

Hashlamoun said 80% of his merchandise is imported. Tariffs have also put a few of his suppliers from India and China out of business, forcing him to search for new partners and enter cash advance agreements to be able to buy some merchandise.

Zhu faces similar supply concerns. "While the tariffs are not as high as April and May, there is still a supply shortage," she said. "Items like certain spices and cakes are taking longer [to arrive]."

ABOVE: A customer shops at 88 Marketplace in the Lower West Side near Chinatown.

LEFT: Jan Zhu, store manager of 88 Marketplace, said the recent 15% import tariffs on South Korean products will make it harder for the grocer to keep prices down.

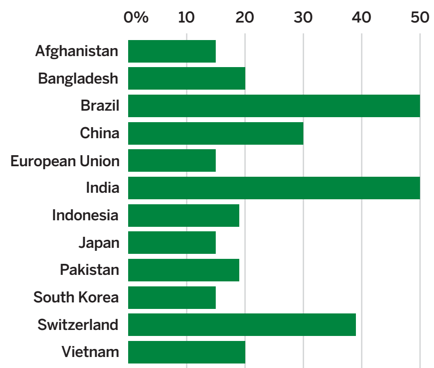
PAT NABONG/SUN-TIMES PHOTOS

The price of grocery items is a major consideration for diaspora communities who shop at ethnic stores, according to Stephen Caine, co-managing partner of Bain and Co.'s Chicago office and member of its retail practice.

"[The] ethnic grocery customer base will pay a premium because they want a specific product or brand from their homeland. ... But in many cases, they are a value-oriented customer," Caine said.

The spending power of immigrant-led households in Illinois is an estimated $68.5 billion, with their estimated tax contribu-

TARIFFS LEVIED ON COUNTRIES



SOURCES: WHITEHOUSE.GOV; REED SMITH
GRAPHIC BY JANANI JANA AND JUSTIN MYERS/SUN-TIMES

tions, including federal, state and local taxes, at $27.4 billion, according to the Vera Institute of Justice.

An estimated 1.7 million immigrants live in Chicago, which makes up 18% of the city's population. And around 1.1 million immigrant workers make up 22% of Chicago's labor force, according to the institute, whose March report includes naturalized citizens.

John Ahmed, who manages a halal meat and produce supermarket at 2650 W. Devon Ave. in West Ridge, has sharply felt the price impact on rice, pulses like beans and lentils, tree nuts and even cookware. His suppliers from Pakistan and Afghanistan have been slapped with 19% and 15% tariffs, respectively. Meanwhile, the U.S. has capped its China tariffs at 30% under a tariff truce that lasts through Nov. 10.

Zhu has noticed Chinese imports like steel pots have become pricier. Since early August, she said suppliers have charged $12 to $13 for steel pots that were previously sold for $10.

Hashlamoun is mindful that his customers, particularly families who might have a fixed budget, may have to forgo buying their nonessential grocery staples.

"Not every item that a customer buys at our store is for the price point; sometimes it is for a particular taste, and if the prices increase on those products, there are hardly any alternatives or substitutes," Hashlamoun said.

"It's not like wages are also rising fast enough. ... The main issue is that the consumer is paying for it. Nobody's going to pick up the tab. The country is not going to pick up the tab. The president is not going to pick up the tab."

Ajeet Singh, president of the Indian American Business Council, said tariffs are a big thing for small businesses. Supply challenges have rocked its members, some of whom are delaying shipments or holding on to stock to tide them over the uncertainty.

"Our hands are tied," said Singh, who is hoping that the U.S. and India agree on a trade deal.

Waseem Hashlamoun, owner of Dukan International in Albany Park, said the cost of importing rice has increased because of tariffs. PAT NABONG/SUN-TIMES PHOTOS

At Dukan International Food Market, zaatar cheese pie went up from $3.99 to $4.99 because tariffs have raised the cost of its ingredients, said owner Waseem Hashlamoun.

Singh feels the bigger impact will be on Indian American working-class households, who will feel squeezed when their average weekly grocery bill goes up.

Saad Ali, manager of West Ridge's Nayab Mart at 2449 W. Devon Ave., had largely avoided tariff-induced price increases from his suppliers in India and Pakistan until August.

"We're just checking the market right now. We are talking to several vendors, some Pakistan vendors, some Indian vendors. ... This is the stock we have right now with the old prices," Ali said, pointing to an aisle of masalas and spices. "But eventually, we have to increase the prices."

Caine said major grocers, who often have a few dedicated aisles for international products, are often able to absorb price increases, but it's not sustainable.

"Most grocery retailers operate with margins in the 2% to 5% range, which is very, very tight. So if there's suddenly a 20% tariff, or a 40% or 50% tariff attached to a number of things, that's impossible for most of them to absorb," he said.

Retailers have been looking at changing suppliers, while also focusing on importing products from countries where there may be exemptions, according to Caine.

"There are certain relationships between Mexico and Canada where some products have been basically exempted from any tariff impact, even if there's a broad tariff impact on the country," Caine said.

Smaller grocers like Ahmed's halal market on Devon Avenue, whose merchandise is not exempt, lack the flexibility to absorb price increases or find new suppliers.

"We're buying little. Just a little bit of whatever we can use. I'm scared that if I buy a lot, after a couple months the price could go back down and the tariffs could go away," Ahmed said.

From the Washington Business Journal:
https://www.bizjournals.com/washington/news/2026/04/20/rivana-groundbreaking-loudoun-silver-line.html

Commercial Real Estate

103-acre Rivana development breaks ground at the Innovation Center Metro

Loudoun County broke ground on Rivana, the massive mixed-use project near the Innovation Metro station.
ABDULLAH KONTE/WBJ

By Janani Jana – Staff Reporter, Washington Business Journal
Apr 20, 2026 **Updated** Apr 21, 2026 2:27pm EDT

Listen to this article 5 min

Story Highlights

- Loudoun leaders and private developers broke ground on Rivana, a 6.4 million-square-foot mixed-use development at the Innovation Center Metro.
- The first phase will span about 2 million gross square feet and include multifamily, hotel, and retail.
- Loudoun will finance infrastructure through about $204 million in TIF bonds.

There was one word that all the dignitaries at Monday's groundbreaking for Rivana – a massive 103-acre mixed-use project straddling the Loudoun and Fairfax county line at the Innovation Center Metro station – used to describe the event and the long-promised, long-planned development.

"Finally."

The project, which has undergone multiple rebrands and visions over two decades, is now underway after Loudoun leaders and master developers Timberline Real Estate Partners and Origami Capital Partners LLC held a ceremonial groundbreaking on what will be a 6.4 million-square-foot development at buildout.

Stan Nix is CEO of Timberline, a co-developer of Rivana.

ABDULLAH KONTE/WBJ

Rivana's first phase will span about 2 million gross square feet, according to Timberline CEO Stan Nix. It will include three multifamily buildings with 1,500 units, a hotel and 150,000 square feet of retail.

Site work is up first, with vertical construction expected to start in mid-2027, officials said. Timberline and Origami have contracts to sell two multifamily pad sites to other developers, the names of which have not been released. Timberline is expected to tackle vertical construction of other projects within Rivana down the road.

The project is expected to take decades to complete.

"After years, maybe decades of talking about what could be here, we're breaking ground on what will be," Buddy Rizer, director of Loudoun's Department of Economic Development, said during the event, held just outside the former Center for Innovative Technology building in Herndon.

Over time, the development, located less than a mile from Dulles International Airport, will see three more phases in Loudoun and a fourth in Fairfax, he told me. It will ultimately include a 463,000-square-foot retail village, 3.5 million square feet of office space, 3,700 residential units, 500 hotel rooms, a performing arts venue and two public parks, according to Loudoun's website.

"Rivana represents the board's vision of a true mixed-use, Metro-connected community, one that brings together a walkable urban center with a lot of destination-planning," said Supervisor Koran Saines, D-Sterling.

Koran T. Saines, Sterling District Supervisor.

ABDULLAH KONTE/WBJ

Rivana will be financed with a mix of public and private sources. Nix declined to provide any details about the private financing or to confirm if the developers have capital partners or construction loans lined up.

The public portion, to be managed by a quasi-governmental entity called the Rivana at Innovation Station Community Development Authority, will include about $204 million in tax-increment financing bonds. The TIF bonds, backed by the future tax revenue generated by the development, will help backed by the future tax revenue generated by the development, will help pay for infrastructure across the site.

The total debt service is expected to rise to about $410 million over 40 years, according to an analysis published by the county.

Buddy Rizer, Loudoun's economic development director, at the Rivana groundbreaking.

ABDULLAH KONTE/WBJ

Rizer sees this project as a catalyst for other planned Silver Line-corridor developments that could be completely built out in about 30 to 40 years. The county is working to accelerate the timeline, he said, but development will remain market driven.

"We've always figured that there's going to be a natural progression north," Rizer told me.

Rivana was formerly known as The Hub, and before that, Dulles World Center. While always in the range of 5.5 million to 6 million square feet, the project has been through countless revisions and ownership groups, and at one time was a potential contender for Amazon.com Inc.'s second headquarters.

Connecticut's Greenfield Partners shepherded Dulles World Center through Loudoun's entitlement process, earning its first approval in 2011. It was redubbed The Hub in 2016. In May 2021, Loudoun issued a press release announcing a third new brand in a decade: Rivana.

Like all the major, slowly evolving developments on Loudoun's Silver Line corridor, from Waterside to Loudoun Station to Moorefield Station, there is a significant office component to Rivana. It's very much still a part of the plan, officials said – a phase 1A, say – and now is not the time.

But its time will come.

"While I agree generally that the market is not great for office right now," Rizer said, "the one exception to that is quality, Metro-connected development."

From the Washington Business Journal:
https://www.bizjournals.com/washington/news/2026/03/26/census-data-greater-washington-2025.html

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Career & Workplace

D.C. metro area added 50,000 residents last year despite fewer immigrant arrivals, new census data show

The D.C. metropolitan area gained population year-over-year at a faster clip than the national average.
MICHAEL NEIBAUER / WBJ

By Janani Jana – Staff Reporter, Washington Business Journal
Mar 26, 2026 **Updated** Mar 26, 2026 8:47am EDT

Listen to this article 6 min

Story Highlights

- The D.C. metro area's population reached 6.46 million as of July 1, 2025.
- The region added 50,206 people, growing 0.78% despite Trump administration policies.
- Federal job losses, immigration curbs could accelerate contraction in the coming year.

Despite concerns that the Trump administration's immigration crackdown and federal workforce reductions would curb the region's growth, Greater

Washington's population grew for the fourth year in a row, albeit at a slower clip than the previous year.

The population estimate stood at 6.46 million as of July 1, 2025, compared to 6.41 million the year prior, for the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria metropolitan statistical area, according to new data released Thursday by the U.S. Census Bureau.

This translates into 50,206 more people in the region, or 0.78% annual growth, according to a Business Journal analysis of census estimates. The U.S. population grew by 0.52%, to 341.78 million from 340 million during the same period.

The bureau's annual cycle starts July 1, so the data capture only the first half of President Donald Trump's first year back in office. The growth is good news for the region, which has relied on international migration to grow in recent years and has been bracing for a downturn amid Trump policies and changes in federal employment.

Highlights of the new data include:

- 68,869 people were born in the region and 39,792 deaths were recorded, an increase in natural change or the difference between births and deaths.
- Total net migration was 21,013, made up of 44,804 international arrivals and 23,791 people who left for other parts of the U.S.

"It's a positive sign for the region, that we're adding without international in-migration," said Keith Waters, the assistant director of the Center for Regional Analysis and the Stephen S. Fuller Institute at George Mason University.

The region's growth fell by nearly 50% compared with the previous 12-month cycle ending July 1, 2024, when births were 68,895 and the death tally was 39,376. The international migration in that period stood at 83,844, while domestic movement leaving the region was 22,784, for a net migration of 61,060.

In 2021, amid the pandemic, the region lost population as people left larger cities for smaller cities and rural areas, where the cost of living was less and they could work remotely.

"Since we've had the paring back of the domestic out-migration, in addition to a pretty steady natural increase, that actually did grow our population even if we set aside international migration," he told me.

He said the international migration number reflects Trump's harsher federal immigration policy and anticipates further contraction in international migration next year.

Less international migration, he said, could have two effects on the economy.

"You would anticipate maybe the rental market has a little bit less pressure. And then the second would be that it is going to make it more difficult to find labor in the area," he said.

WASHINGTON D.C. METRO YOY POPULATION CHANGE

Over five years, the population of the Washington D.C. metro grew b people from July 1, 2020 to July 1, 2025, a roughly 3.3% increase.

2021	−1.02K
2022	+20.69K
2023	+48.42K
2024	+86.79K
2025	+50.21K

Federal layoffs and private sector stagnation have already driven up unemployment rates in every county in the DMV region, according to a Brookings report in March. Waters anticipates that the full extent of federal layoffs will show in the July 1, 2026, estimate as people were removed from federal payrolls in the second half of 2025.

The Business Journal reported in January that the total number of federal jobs in Greater Washington has fallen to 327,100 – a 25-year low. The Fuller Institute estimated the region lost 52,900 federal jobs between December 2024 and November 2025, based on BLS data.

"So if domestic out migration continues at the pace it's been going at, we would expect the labor market actually to tighten somewhat as employers are just having to make do with the population that's here," Waters said.

The Washington-Arlington-Alexandria metro area, which is used to define the change in Greater Washington, includes the District of Columbia and parts of Virginia, Maryland and West Virginia.

This includes all of the District of Columbia; nine Virginia counties including Arlington, Clarke, Fairfax, Fauquier, Loudoun, Prince William, Spotsylvania, Stafford and Warren counties; six cities in Virginia including Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Fredericksburg, Manassas and Manassas Park; five counties in Maryland namely Calvert, Charles, Frederick, Montgomery and Prince George's County; and finally Jefferson County in West Virginia.

All Greater Washington counties and cities, including the District, gained population between July 2024 and 2025, according to the new data, though the percentages vary widely. The District's population estimate rose 0.34% to 693,645, Montgomery County by 0.14% to 1,074,582, Prince George's County by 0.6% to 970,374, and Fairfax County by 0.7% to 1,167,873.

The three biggest gainers regionally were the city of Fairfax, which grew by 2.82% to 26,772; Arlington County, which grew by 1.77% to 243,931; and Loudoun County, which grew year-over-year by 1.35% to 449,749.

Prince William County, meanwhile, grew 0.93% year-over-year to an estimated population of 502,966, topping half a million for the first time. It is the only jurisdiction in Virginia other than Fairfax to have crossed that threshold.

Just outside of Greater Washington but still in the metropolitan statistical area, Clarke County in Virginia and Calvert County in Maryland both experienced minor population declines, both by 0.14%.

SOUTH SIDE WEEKLY

Expiring Federal Funds Threaten Chicago’s Alternative Crisis Response Effort

Chicago will need to dig deep to sustain and expand the CARE program, but state funds could offer hope.

by **Janani Jana** and **Nicole Jeanine Johnson** August 28, 2025

Federal pandemic relief dollars that help pay for a Chicago program that sends clinicians instead of police to mental health crises are expiring, and under President Donald Trump’s administration, new funds for mental health and police alternatives seem unlikely.

Mayor Brandon Johnson has pledged to expand the Crisis Assistance Response & Engagement (CARE) program citywide; currently it serves only a limited number of neighborhoods. But the likely end of federal support means the city will need to find millions of dollars to sustain it—and even more to pay for the proposed expansion. A state program that provides funding for mental health crisis services is a potential source to help fill the gap.

This year, more than 80 percent of CARE funding comes from the federal American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA), which provided COVID-19 pandemic relief, according to an analysis of budget documents by Medill and MindSite News.

"CARE is currently federally funded. And that funding is set to expire at the end of next year," Dr. Jenny Hua, the medical director and deputy interim commissioner of behavioral health for the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH), told Medill and MindSite News.

She added that a reduction in federal funding creates "a terrible crisis for not just the health department but for all city agencies."

The city used $4.46 million in ARPA funding for CARE employee salaries and pensions in 2025. Just $892,200 was devoted to CARE from the city's corporate fund, the main pot of city revenue. An additional $118,000 was carried over from the previous year's CARE budget.

So, millions in expiring pandemic funds will need to be replaced in coming years just to maintain CARE at its current level of service. In 2024, CARE responded to 239 calls, mostly in seven of the city's twenty-two police districts, between the hours of 10:30 a.m. and 4 p.m.

There are currently fifteen police districts without CARE teams. Adding an additional team to each would cost about $9.75 million and expanding CARE service around the clock would cost about $7 million, according to the 19th Police District Council, an elected public safety body. 19th District Councilor Jennifer Schaffer said the figures are based on discussions with the mayor's office.

The Mayor's Office did not respond to questions about the cost of citywide expansion or other questions about the CARE budget.

In a statement to Medill and MindSite News, a spokesperson for Johnson said: "Mayor Johnson is fully committed to putting forward a budget that maintains funding for the CARE program and for mental health services generally. In his first two budgets, Mayor Johnson doubled the funding for CARE and, in spite of the serious fiscal challenges that the City is facing, Mayor Johnson plans to maintain funding for the CARE program while continuing to make reforms and adjustments so that the program can be successful and serve as many Chicagoans as possible within its current scope."

Where the money goes

CARE was launched as a pilot program in 2021, and in the 2022, 2023, and 2024 budgets, the city allocated $1 million a year for the program.

An additional $6.87 million of ARPA money has also been budgeted for CARE since 2022. All pandemic relief money must be spent by 2026 or returned to the federal government.

Hua said that ARPA funds allocated for CARE will likely be used up this year and that in 2026, CARE would tap ARPA dollars that were originally allocated to another health department program for housing stabilization. According to the city's ARPA dashboard, less than ten percent of the stabilization funds have been spent, leaving $4.87 million seemingly available for CARE.

The city's Office of Budget Management did not respond to queries about such a reallocation.

CARE launched in 2021 as a joint program of the police, fire and public health departments under police administration. In September 2024, **CARE was moved from the police department** to the Department of Public Health and police officers were removed from the CARE teams. As **part of the transition**, the city reduced its reliance on contractors in favor of city employees, documents obtained by Medill show.

As of 2024, CARE had twenty-two full-time employees including crisis clinicians, community intervention specialists, and Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs). Seventeen of them were assigned to the CARE team that year, with the bulk of their salaries paid with federal pandemic funds.

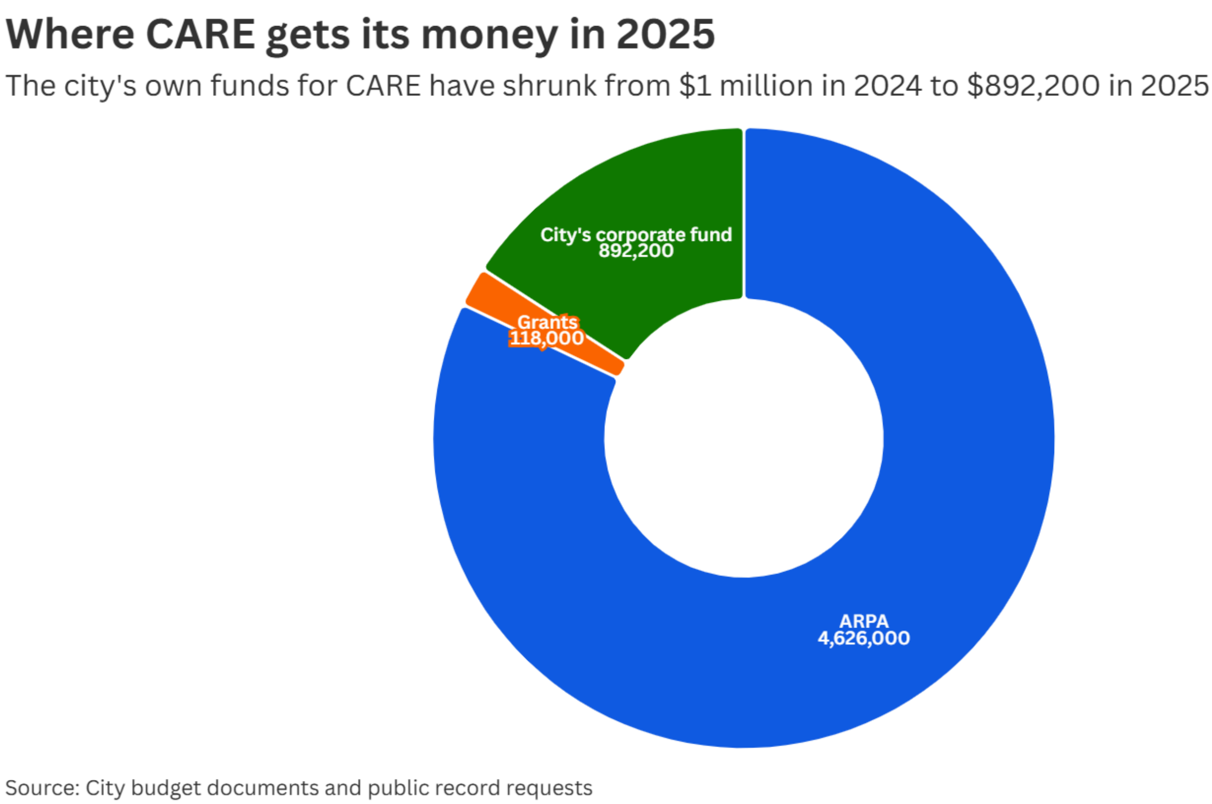
ARPA funds also paid for uniform allowances, office supplies, computer hardware, and communication devices.

In 2025, $500,000 in city funds were spent on paramedics who work with CARE clinicians and almost $300,000 was spent on gift cards used for Narcan, fentanyl test strips, and other supplies.

Demand for more CARE

On a Saturday afternoon in May, Patrick Lindley sat at the back of a small room in McFetridge Sports Center on Chicago's Northwest side for a meeting of the 17th Police District Council.

The Albany Park neighborhood where Lindley resides is not part of CARE's coverage area, but there's plenty of need for CARE response. More than 700 calls were made to 911 for potential mental health emergencies in 2024 from the Albany Park community, according to **city data**.



"I don't know how many of the folks that we have responding to 911 calls in our district are trauma-informed," said Lindley, a community volunteer who would like CARE to extend to his neighborhood. "An ounce of prevention saves a pound of pain."

Alderperson Rossanna Rodríguez Sánchez (33rd Ward) agreed.

"What we are missing is the commitment to funding that is going to allow us to expand this in a way that our communities need," she told the group. "This saves lives, this saves us money."

State funding potential

Could state funds provide the lifeline that CARE needs?

A 2021 law called the **Community Emergency Services and Supports Act** (CESSA) **funds programs** similar to CARE that sends mental health workers instead of cops. In 2024, **the state awarded** almost $70 million through CESSA to county public health departments, hospitals and non-profits, including some in Chicago.

A spokesperson for the Mayor's Office said the city is looking to the 590 program as a source of funds for CARE, but the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) told Medill and MindSite News that the program is not accepting new applicants for fiscal year 2026.

Hua said the health department is "in communication with the state to see if we're eligible to apply and if the application is open."

Clinicians or police?

Schaffer, a member of the 19th Police District Council, said while she and other CARE proponents are not seeking to "defund the police," they believe that unfilled positions built into the city's $1.8 billion police personnel budget could be used to help fund CARE.

In 2025, **The TRii**BE reported that $170 million was budgeted for vacant police positions; advocates have called for those funds to be used for youth and public health programs. As of April, the department had vacancies for 142 police officers, seventy-seven field training officers, and fifty-five sergeants, according to the Chicago Public Data Portal.

Expanding CARE would take mental health crises off the police department's plate, freeing officers to do the work they are trained for, Schaffer said.

Budget discussions that began this month will help determine CARE's future. Rodríguez-Sánchez, Schaffer, and other leaders are urging the mayor and City Council to keep it going.

"If they don't find a way to fund it, it's going to go away," Schaffer said. "It is the mayor's job to hear what the community wants and figure out how to get it funded."

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