



MEMORANDUM

To: The Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Richard Hicks, Interim City Manager
Sean Clark, Parks and Recreation Director
Jon Hawley, Grants Administrator

Date: April 8, 2022

Re: Consideration - Authorization to Apply for an Access Grant for Coast Guard Park

BACKGROUND:

In 2020, the City of Elizabeth City opened US Coast Guard Park along our southern waterfront, offering a new park providing a boardwalk, kayak launch, floating docks and other amenities. This park expanded the public's waterfront access and was a great win for the City; it also represented an investment of more than \$550,000, the majority of which was paid by state grants from the Division of Coastal Management (DCM), the Division of Water Resources, and the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund.

However, while Coast Guard Park is now open to the public, it is not a "complete" park. Even with the substantial grants the City received, the scope of work was limited. The most significant outstanding item is the need for new and extended bulkhead around the site's metal building, which is instrumental for storing equipment and/or supporting programming, such as kayak rentals.

City staff propose to apply to the DCM's Public Beach and Coastal Waterfront Access Grant Program to seek funding for these needed improvements. The Access grant program is offered to the communities in North Carolina's 20 coastal counties. For the 2022 cycle, it has a total of \$1.2 million to disburse. Pre-applications are due April 22, with final applications due August 22.

ANALYSIS:

The Coast Guard Park building needs new and extended bulkhead because the existing bulkhead is deteriorated and the building is very vulnerable to flooding. It sits on a small lot that juts off the western side of the property and into the Pasquotank River, and it is only a few feet above sea level. Tides hit the building on its northern, western, and

southern sides, but the bulkhead only extends around the northern and western sides. The southern side has become very narrow and continues to erode, creating a risk that the building's foundation could be damaged. The northern and western bulkhead – likely installed 20 years or more before the City took ownership – are also aged and cracked in some places. Soil erosion is also visible in several locations behind the bulkhead. This building needs to be protected and preserved to avoid major repair costs in the future, and to ensure the proper operation of this new, state-funded park.

The building needs a complete, functional bulkhead to ensure its longevity. City staff are consulting with a marine contractor for detailed cost estimates of this work, but we believe most or all of the work could be done for \$150,000. We propose to submit this project cost to DCM.

However, the Access Grant Program does have a local matching requirement: 10 percent of project costs, in the case of Tier 1 communities such as Elizabeth City. This means our grant request would be for \$135,000, with a local match of \$15,000. While this is still a significant commitment, a 90-percent state match is still excellent leveraging.

City staff also wish to acknowledge that we previously applied to the Access grant program for this work in 2021, but our request was denied. Two factors give us optimism that our request might be more favorably considered now. First, we are proposing only bulkhead installation, whereas our prior application proposed bulkhead and boardwalk installation, putting costs at nearly \$300,000. This likely made our application too expensive; we would still pursue additional boardwalk in the future. Second, this year's Access Program specifically offers funding for maintenance of previously funded sites. This means applications that preserve public access, rather than expand it, should receive more favorable consideration.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

By motion, authorize City staff to apply to the Public Beach and Coastal Waterfront Access Program for bulkhead installation at US Coast Guard Park, in the amount of approximately \$135,000 plus a local match of approximately \$15,000.