



MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Reginald Goodson, City Manager
Stacy Williams, Parks and Recreation Director
Carl Best, Development Services Director
Jon Hawley, Grants Administrator

Date: April 8, 2026

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

BACKGROUND:

In 2019, the City of Elizabeth City opened Coast Guard Park, a prominent and popular park on our downtown waterfront. Acquired and developed with multiple state grants, Coast Guard Park is a roughly half-acre property with excellent access to the Pasquotank River. Its current amenities include a wooden boardwalk, fishing pier, floating dock/kayak launch, open space/picnic area, and a metal storage/staging building.

Unfortunately, the site remains in need of substantial repairs and improvements. Prior grants could not fully repair the site, particularly the bulkhead surrounding the building. This is causing erosion around the building's foundation and exacerbating flooding there. This not only damages the building, but limits its use for park activities. Additionally, the parking lot is showing erosion and damage as its permeable pavers haven't held up to heavy use.

Improvements to Coast Guard Park are a top priority for the Parks and Recreation Department, and Parks and Rec has requested funding for those improvements in the City's FY2027 budget. To maximize the impact of local dollars, City staff are also proposing to apply to the NC Division of Coastal Management's Public Beach and Waterfront Access Grant Program for supplemental funding.

ANALYSIS:

Working with a construction contractor and one of the City's on-call engineering firms, City staff estimate improvements to Coast Guard Park will cost \$1.1 million. Our proposed scope includes:

- Replacement of approximately 400 linear feet of deteriorated bulkhead

- Installation of a new bulkhead cap and integrated, concrete walkway along the shoreline
- Boardwalk and pier improvements
- Shoreline stabilization work; nature-based where feasible
- Improved grading and drainage to reduce flooding; introduce rain gardens for water storage and beautification
- Parking area improvements

Construction of these improvements is estimated to cost \$736,500; engineering, site planning, and permitting would add another \$300,000. The engineering cost includes geotechnical testing and detailed structural design to ensure the new bulkhead's longevity; it also includes site planning that could position the City for future phases and grant applications. The total project cost is rounded to \$1.1 million to include contingency funds.

The Access grant program's purpose is to provide pedestrian access to public waters across North Carolina's 20 coastal counties. It has invested in Coast Guard Park before, and City staff are hopeful it will do so again. However, the program only has \$1.5 million in total funding for FY2026-2027. There is no maximum grant limit, but program staff have warned that large requests may be impossible to fund. Additionally, if the project is funded, the City must provide a 10-percent match.

City staff are exploring additional grant programs that could supplement an Access grant and further reduce the City's costs. However, winning additional, competitive grants is not assured. We are therefore requesting the Council authorize an Access grant application of \$400,000 to supplement the \$750,000 Parks and Rec has requested in the FY27 budget. A pre-application is due April 24. If the City is invited to submit a final application, it will be due July 31.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

By motion: authorize City staff to submit an Access grant pre-application for \$400,000 for Coast Guard Park improvements, and to leverage anticipated FY27 budget appropriations as match, as proposed herein.