



# MEMORANDUM

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**To:** Mayor and Members of the City Council

**From:** Montique McClary, Interim City Manager  
Dwan Bell, Public Utilities Director  
Sean Clark, Parks and Recreation Director  
Deborah Malenfant, ECDI Executive Director  
Jon Hawley, Grants Administrator

**Date:** October 21, 2022

**Re:** Consideration - Grant Application to the Rural Transformation Grant Fund for Water Street and Mariners' Wharf Park Improvements

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## ***BACKGROUND:***

This year, the NC Department of Commerce, Rural Economic Development Division, launched a new grant opportunity for community revitalization projects in rural communities. This opportunity is called the Rural Transformation Grant (RTG) Fund, and it offers no-match grants of up to \$950,000 for projects in the following categories:

- Downtown revitalization
- Resilient neighborhoods
- Community enhancement for economic growth
- Rural community capacity building

After considering potential projects, City staff and Elizabeth City Downtown, Inc., propose seeking an RTG for the "Water Street Transformation Project (WSTP)" Our proposal is part of a broader vision to make Water Street a more accessible and appealing corridor. Water Street is a high priority for these improvements because it is a gateway to downtown Elizabeth City, and it connects the community and visitors to our many businesses, parks, events and other attractions near the downtown waterfront. It also serves as a direct connection to two of our educational assets, Elizabeth City State University and Mid-Atlantic Christian University. Improving the corridor is therefore not only a matter of access, safety and enjoyment, but boosting economic activity.

## ***ANALYSIS:***

As stated above, the Water Street Transformation Project is part of a broader vision to make this key corridor as accessible and appealing as possible. Major components of this vision include:

- **Accessibility/Safety:** As far back as 2001, studies have found that Water Street is “pedestrian-unfriendly” due to its width and weak pedestrian links. There is also a need to enhance parking while not diminishing pedestrian or community spaces. There is a need for improved sidewalks, crosswalks, lighting, and access to parking.
- **Traffic Calming:** Related to accessibility, Water Street’s width and number of lanes, pose an inconvenience and even safety risk to pedestrians trying to reach downtown destinations. As supported by a 2018 “Road Diet” study, converting some outer travel lanes to on-street parking while maintaining bidirectional travel is desirable to balance traffic flow with motorist and pedestrian access to the downtown. This is anticipated to slow the speed of traffic heading both north and south on Water Street, making it safer for pedestrians at intersections, as well as in the Waterfront Park/Museum of the Albemarle area, and continuing south into the residential neighborhood.
- **Corridor Appeal and Event/Community Space:** Water Street lacks appealing elements of a downtown destination such as greenery, decorative lighting, and more convenient benches and litter receptacles. A previously implemented streetscape plan ended on Water Street at Main Street. Its parks are also limited in the size/appeal of performances and other popular events they may offer.
- **Connectivity:** Downtown has seen clusters of significant growth over the last five years, including the entertainment attractions of Main and Poindexter Streets and new/in-progress development on Fearing, Church, and Ehringhaus Streets. These growth clusters need to be bridged, so downtown visitors may seamlessly move through our many new downtown businesses, activities, and community spaces. There is also a continuing need to better connect the downtown to nearby educational institutions.

If funded, the WSTP would be a major step towards achieving this vision. Our proposal includes two main Project Elements:

**Project Element 1:** Streetscaping on Water Street from Main to Ehringhaus Streets, including extensive new/improved sidewalks with tree pits, new decorative lighting, and new benches and litter receptacles. (Note: if the project budget allows, sidewalk improvements on connecting streets, such as Main, Church and Fearing, might also be included.)

**Project Element 2:** Improve Mariner’s Wharf Park as an event and activities venue by building a small amphitheater (approx. dimensions 30’x25’) with metal frame and roof, and converting a storage area in the midsection of the current ECDI building to a new concession area. (Note: the amphitheater would replace the current shade structure at Mariner’s Wharf, but its position might also be shifted slightly from the shade structure

pad, so as to not interfere with foot traffic to the current bathrooms and proposed concession area.)

The RTG Fund narrowly defines eligible streetscaping expenses, so the grant application will be specific to the sidewalk improvements and Mariners' Wharf Park improvements. Since Water Street is a NC Department of Transportation roadway and we need their support for this project, they have been part of the discussions and planning. They are an ally for this project, and we have their commitment to support the improvements to the sidewalks and curbing improvements and support the grant application. They have also committed to help find funds to resurface and implement the "Road Diet" plan from Southern Avenue northward (with some potential tweaks after final evaluation).

Although there is no local match required, the Elizabeth City Downtown, Inc. Board of Directors voted on Thursday to contribute a \$25,000.00 local match. This would help to cover some elements of the overall scope of the project that cannot be funded by the RTG.

The grant application is due by November 1, 2022, and will be very competitive. We request the Council's approval to submit this application, including adoption of the required resolution provided herein. While the exact project budget is being finalized, our application will not exceed \$950,000 and no City match is required or proposed.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

**As this application is time sensitive, staff requests that if the Council wishes to move forward with it, it be placed on the Regular Session for approval after the Work Session presentation.**

By motion, authorize the submission of a Rural Transformation Grant Fund application for the Water Street Transformation Project, in the funding amount of up to \$950,000, and authorize adoption of the enclosed resolution.



**City of Elizabeth City Resolution #2022-10-01**  
**Application to the North Carolina Department of Commerce**  
**Rural Transformation Grant Fund**  
**The Water Street Transformation Project**  
**(A Downtown Revitalization Initiative)**

**WHEREAS**, the Elizabeth City City Council has indicated its desire to assist in development efforts within Elizabeth City; and,

**WHEREAS**, the Board fully supports the proposed "Water Street Transformation Project," a downtown revitalization project for streetscaping and park improvements on and adjacent to the Water Street corridor to support community and economic development for Elizabeth City; and,

**WHEREAS**, the City Council wishes to pursue a formal application for Downtown Revitalization in an amount not to exceed \$950,000 from the North Carolina Department of Commerce, Rural Transformation Grant Fund, Rural Engagement & Investment Program;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:**

That the Elizabeth City City Council authorizes submission of a formal application to the North Carolina Department of Commerce, Rural Transformation Grant Fund, Rural Engagement & Investment Program, in order to request funding assistance for the Water Street Transformation Project and downtown revitalization for the City of Elizabeth City.

**ADOPTED**, this the 24<sup>th</sup> day of October.

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E. Kirk Rivers  
Mayor

ATTEST:

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April D. Onley, NCCMC  
City Clerk