



MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and Members of City Council

From: Reggie Goodson, City Manager
Deborah Malenfant, Executive Director, Elizabeth City Downtown, Inc.

Date: March 4, 2026

Re: **Consideration** – Street Closing Requests Involving State Roadways within Municipal Corporate Limits and Alcohol on Public Property Request – 2026 NC Potato Festival

BACKGROUND:

On July 31, 2015, North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) Chief Engineer, Michael L. Holder provided notice to Division Engineers, including Jerry Jennings of Highway Division 1 (which covers Camden, Currituck, Dare, Gates, Pasquotank and Perquimans Counties), that the new guidelines concerning authorization to close a State roadway so as to conduct a special event were effective immediately. The policy recognizes that counties and municipalities have the statutory authority to hold events that they sponsor or are responsible for, and thereby, can adopt a local ordinance declaring the purpose, date and duration for the closing of a local roadway or a State roadway within the local jurisdiction. This type of ordinance does not require a public hearing. Advance notice and a copy of the adopted ordinance must be provided to the NCDOT Division office.

Under Section 130.02 of the City's Code of Ordinances, the City Council has granted the City Manager the authority to approve the consumption of alcohol on City property, subject to review by the City Council. For larger festivals or unique situations, full review by City Council is preferred.

ANALYSIS:

Street Closings – The 2026 N.C. Potato Festival is scheduled for May 15, 16, and 17, 2026 in Downtown Elizabeth City. There were some minor changes to the festival's footprint and layout back during the 2022 NC Potato Festival, which were received positively by the community and operations personnel, and we will continue with that footprint this year. The official City of Elizabeth City Special Event Permit has been completed and submitted for

consideration and approval. The Potato Festival Committee is currently requesting permission for street closing of several local and state-controlled roadways. The State street closing schedule follows. The request involves the successful location for the Main Stage and beer/wine garden and minimizing the festival area on Main Street.

North Carolina Potato Festival Street & Park Closing Schedule

Along with all the fun and excitement created by the festival comes a certain amount of congestion and the need to reroute traffic. Following is the street and park closing schedule due to the festival.

Saturday, May 9

- College Park will close at 10 pm.

Monday, May 11

- Waterfront Park Boat Ramp and Parking area close at approximately 10pm to begin ride and midway setup.

Tuesday, May 12

- Water Street from Shepard Street to Ehringhaus Street close at approximately 10am to begin ride and midway setup.
- Ehringhaus Street Right East bound lane from McMorrine to Water close at approximately 10am (due to no exit onto Water Street).

Thursday, May 14

- Ehringhaus Street from McMorrine to Water close at approximately 10am.
- Water Street from Church Street to Ehringhaus Street close at approximately 10am (due to no exit onto Ehringhaus Street).
- Mariners' Wharf Park close at 10am for Beer Garden/Cornhole/Kickoff Party setup.
- Mariners' Wharf Park Parking lot close at 11pm for Stage setup.

Friday, May 15

- Water Street from Church Street to Colonial Avenue close at 10am for vendor setup.
- Water Street South Bound lane from Elizabeth Street to Colonial Avenue close at 10am (due to no exit).
- Main Street from McMorrine Street to Water Street close at 10am due to vendor/festival setup and no exit onto Water Street.
- Poindexter connector street from Colonial Avenue to Fearing Street closed.

Saturday, May 16

- Riverside Avenue from Water Street to Morgan Street close from 7am until end of 5K / 1 Mike Walk.
- Main Street from Martin Luther King Street to McMorrine Street close at 7am for Auto/Motorcycle show setup.
- McMorrine connector streets from Colonial Avenue to Fearing Street close at 7am.

Roads will be reopened as soon as Festival area is cleared of vendors, no later than Monday, May 19 at 6am.

Roads and parks will be reopened as soon as festival area is cleared of vendors, no later than Monday, May 18 at 6:00 am (but we usually open the streets back up by 9:00 pm Sunday evening). The 2026 North Carolina Potato Festival Preliminary Festival Layout with Street Closings depicting the list above is included for your reference.

City Clerk will send the requisite advance notice to NC DOT pending approval by City Council. Staff does not object to the street closing schedule as proposed. City personnel and regional public safety agencies will be coordinating emergency response, alternative vehicular traffic routes, and safe pedestrian activity for the duration of the event. Local public safety agencies, including Police, Fire, and Emergency Services will be actively involved in the planning of the festival and ensure that there is appropriate access for emergency service vehicles to reach any downtown residents or festival participants in case of an emergency.

Alcohol on Public Property – NC Potato Festival organizers are also requesting permission to designate an area for the serving of alcohol. This area is located on public property. It is understood that this area will be utilized as part of the 2026 NC Potato Festival for the Beer/Wine Garden and Cornhole Tournament.

Area: Mariners' Wharf Park

Serving Times: Friday, May 15, 5:00 p.m. until 11:00 pm; Saturday, May 16, from 12:00 p.m. until 11:00 p.m.; Sunday May 17, from 12:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m.

The area will be supervised and managed by NC Potato Festival staff and volunteers who have completed required training by the Alcohol Beverage Control Commission and have experience in serving in private settings, as well as at events. Festival organizers also work with ABC Commission and ALE officers in the planning and enforcement of the service area. The area will be secured and monitored and will have police and private security presence during service times. All necessary ABC permits will be obtained by the NC Potato Festival organizers.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

By motion, adopt Ordinance #2026-03-03 declaring street closing(s) for the Annual North Carolina Potato Festival and authorize Elizabeth City Downtown Inc. to serve alcohol on public property as part of the 2026 NC Potato Festival event, contingent upon compliance with all Alcohol Beverage Control rules and regulations, as well as compliance with the City's Code of Ordinances and Guidelines regarding the Consumption of Alcoholic Beverages in Public Places.

Attachments:

[Ordinance](#)

NCPF Street Closure Map

NCPF Festival Layout

2026 North Carolina Potato Festival Festival Layout with Street Closings



North Carolina Potato Festival 2026

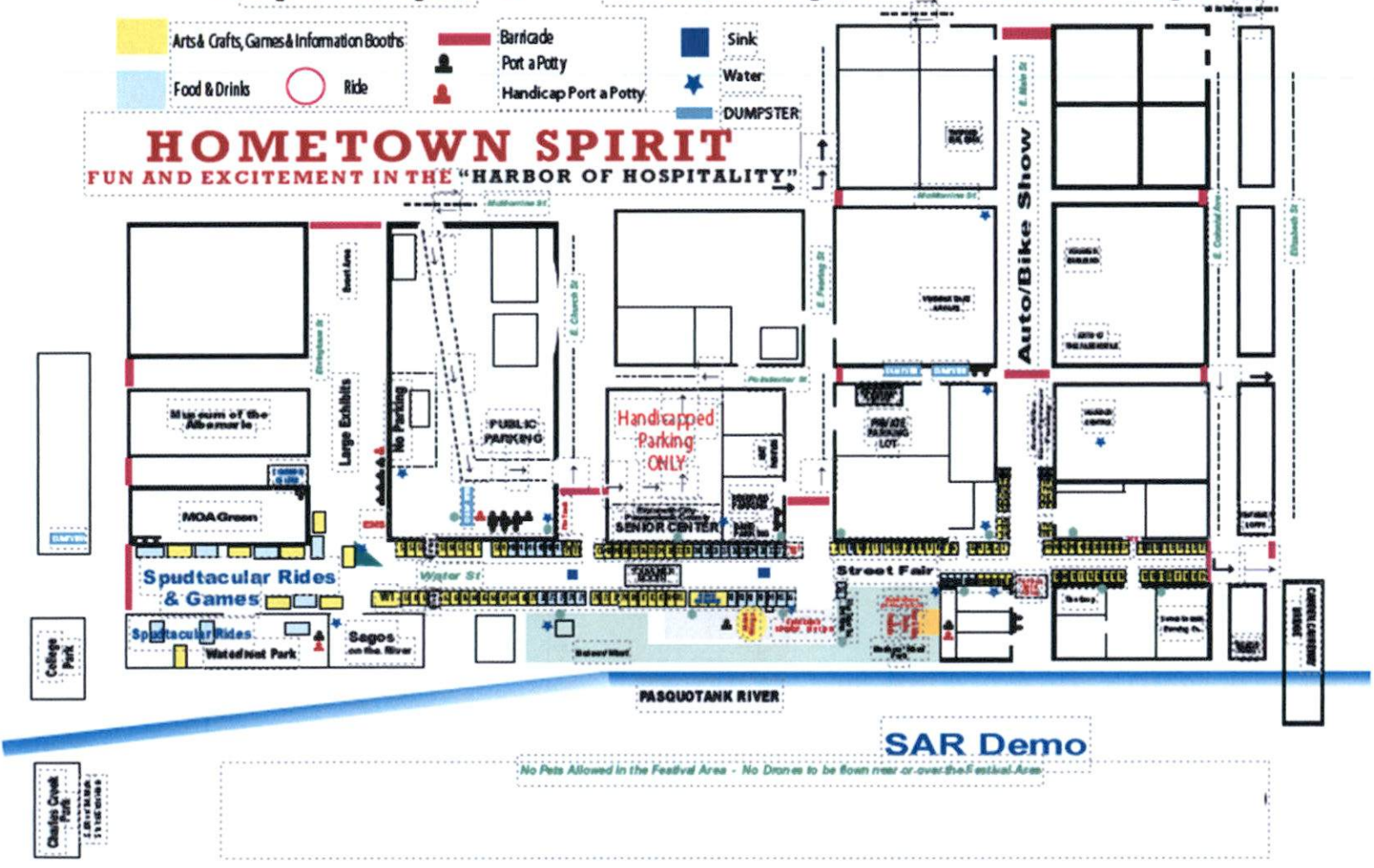
Friday, May 15
5 pm - 11 pm

Saturday, May 16
10 am - 11 pm

Sunday, May 17
10 am - 6 pm

- Arts & Crafts, Games & Information Booths
- Food & Drinks
- Ride
- Barricade
- Port a Potty
- Handicap Port a Potty
- Sink
- Water
- DUMPSTER

HOMETOWN SPIRIT
FUN AND EXCITEMENT IN THE "HARBOR OF HOSPITALITY"



College Park

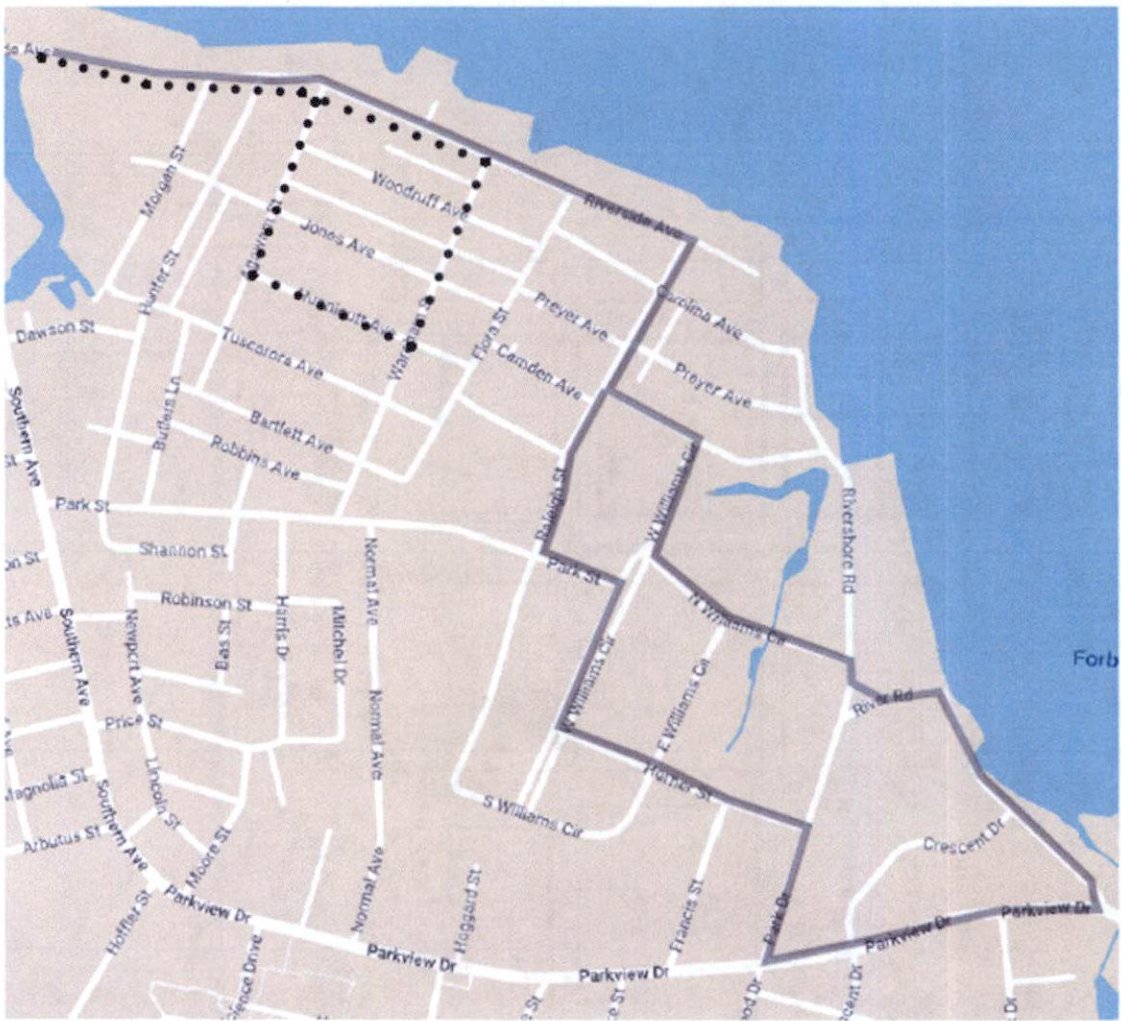
College Park

College Park

PASQUOTANK RIVER

SAR Demo

No Pets Allowed in the Festival Area - No Drones to be flown near or over the Festival Area





ORDINANCE #2026-03-03
AN ORDINANCE DECLARING A ROAD CLOSURE FOR THE ANNUAL NORTH CAROLINA POTATO FESTIVAL

WHEREAS, the City Council of Elizabeth City acknowledges a long tradition of providing an annual springtime festival for the pleasure of its citizens; and

WHEREAS, the City Council of Elizabeth City acknowledges its citizens realize a financial benefit from holding the annual North Carolina Potato Festival event; and

WHEREAS, the City Council of Elizabeth City acknowledges the festival event requires approximately six days to install signing and traffic control, amusement and entertainment structures and equipment, food and other vendors, and other attractions, and also requires approximately ten (10) hours for removing same, and litter;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT ORDAINED, by the City Council of Elizabeth City pursuant to the authority granted by G.S. 20-169 that they do hereby declare a temporary road closure during the day(s) and times set forth below on the following described portion of a **State Highway System route**:

- **Date(s) and Times:** 10:00 a.m. Tuesday, May 12, 2026 until 6:00 a.m. Monday, May 18, 2026.
- **Route Description(s):** S Water/Southern Avenue Street (SR 34/1164) between E Ehringhaus Street (US Business Highway 17) and Shepard Street; E Ehringhaus Street, eastbound lanes from S McMorrine Street to S Water Street (SR 34/1164)
- **Date(s) and Times:** 10:00 a.m. Thursday, May 14, 2026 until 6:00 a.m. Monday, May 18, 2026.
- **Route Description(s):** E Ehringhaus Street (US Business Highway 17), all lanes from McMorrine Street to S Water Street; S Water Street (SR 34/1164) from E Ehringhaus Street (US Business Highway 17) to E Church Street
- **Date(s) and Times:** 10:00 a.m. Friday, May 15, 2026 until 6:00 a.m. Monday, May 18, 2026.
- **Route Description(s):** North and South Water Street (SR 34/1164) from E Church Street to E Colonial Avenue; Water Street southbound lane from Elizabeth Street to Colonial Avenue.

SECTION I. EFFECTIVE DATE: This Ordinance to become effective when signs are erected giving notice of the limits and times of the event, and implementation of adequate traffic control to guide through vehicles around the event parameters.

SECTION II. SEVERABILITY CLAUSE. If any section, or part of provision of this Ordinance is declared unconstitutional or invalid by a court of competent jurisdiction, then it is expressly provided and it is the intention of the City Council of the City of Elizabeth City in passing this Ordinance that its parts shall be severable and all other parts of this Ordinance shall not be affected thereby and they shall remain in full force and effect.

READ, CONSIDERED, AND ADOPTED at a regular meeting of the City Council of the City of Elizabeth City, North Carolina, during which a quorum was present, held on the 9th day of March 2026.

E. Kirk Rivers
Mayor

Attest:

April D. Onley, NCCMC
City Clerk