

## **MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Dr. Kim Eagle, County Manager

**From:** Randi Gates, GCLMPO, Principal Transportation Planner

**Thru:** Matt Blackwell, Assistant Director, Budget & Strategy

**Date:** August 3, 2023

**Subject:** Item for August 22, 2023 County Commissioners Meeting

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### **RESOLUTION TO SUPPORT APPLICATION TO U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION'S 2023 RECONNECTING COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBORHOODS (RCN) PROGRAM**

#### **Background**

The City of Gastonia, with support from Gaston County, is seeking a Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods (RCN) Grant to complete a feasibility study to cap the railroad ditch that runs through Downtown Gastonia, which creates a barrier to mobility, connectivity, access, and economic development to the transportation disadvantaged communities to the north.

Over the last 30 years, the decline of the neighborhoods north of the railroad corridor are a direct indication of the lack of connectivity and accessibility. The neighborhoods to the north of the rail corridor were once part of Downtown Gastonia, but are now segregated. Postcard images from before the railroad was ditched show a level of development equal to that along Main Avenue today, but unfortunately, the character of this area today has been completely altered from its previous self. The range of uses that once thrived to the north of the rail corridor point to a vital and active collection of urban, mixed use neighborhoods.

Project CHANGE – Connecting Highland: Access, Neighborhood Growth, Equity, a.k.a. the Downtown Gastonia Reconnector Project, was identified as a project in the NC-7 Corridor Study and Plan, completed in January 2018 by the City of Gastonia and the Gaston Economic Development Commission.

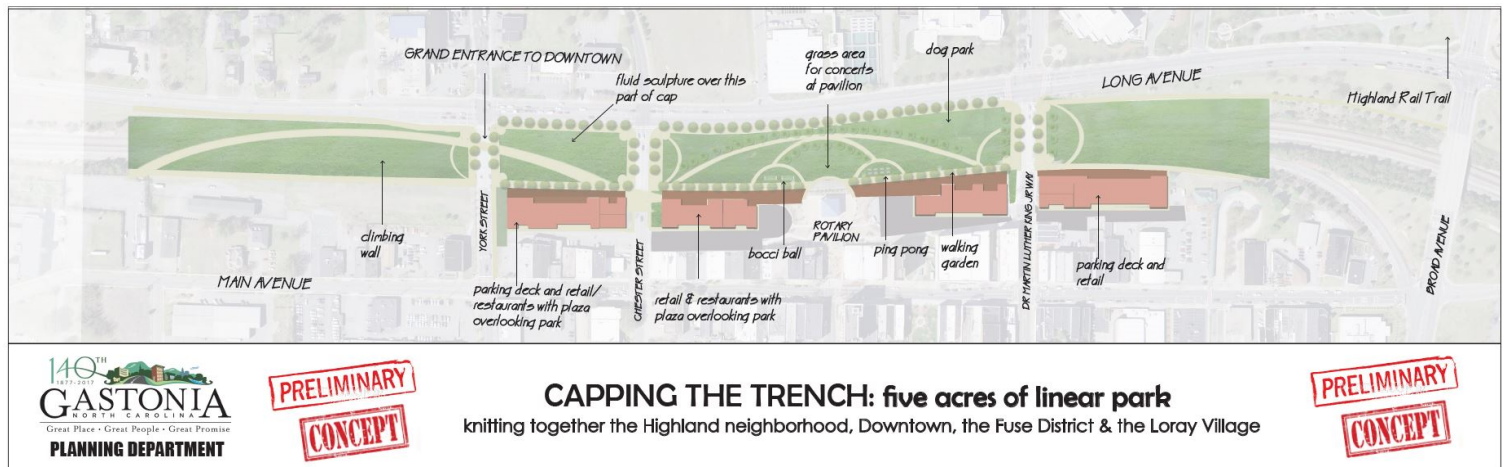
Project CHANGE is transformational and RCN funding is critical to advance this project by the completion of a feasibility study to understand the technical and financial feasibilities of capping the railroad ditch while looking to maximize public benefits by way of better mobility and connectivity, and assessing various development opportunities.

#### **RCN Grant Application Submittal**

The U.S. Department of Transportation's (USDOT) Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods (RCN) Program provides grant funding for planning and capital construction to address infrastructure barriers, restore community connectivity, and improve peoples' lives.

Funds for the FY 2023 RCN Program are to be awarded on a competitive basis for projects that advance community-centered connection transportation projects, with a priority for projects that benefit disadvantaged communities, by improving access to daily needs such as jobs, education, health care, food, nature and recreation; fostering equitable development and restoration; and reconnecting communities by removing, retrofitting, or mitigating highways or other transportation facilities that create barriers to community connectivity, including to mobility, access, or economic development.

Applications must be submitted by Thursday, September 28, 2023.



## Recommendation

Approve the attached Resolution of Support for the City of Gastonia's Application to the U.S. Department of Transportation's 2023 RCN Program.