



Project CHANGE Feasibility Study

Connecting Highland: Access, Neighborhood Growth, Equity

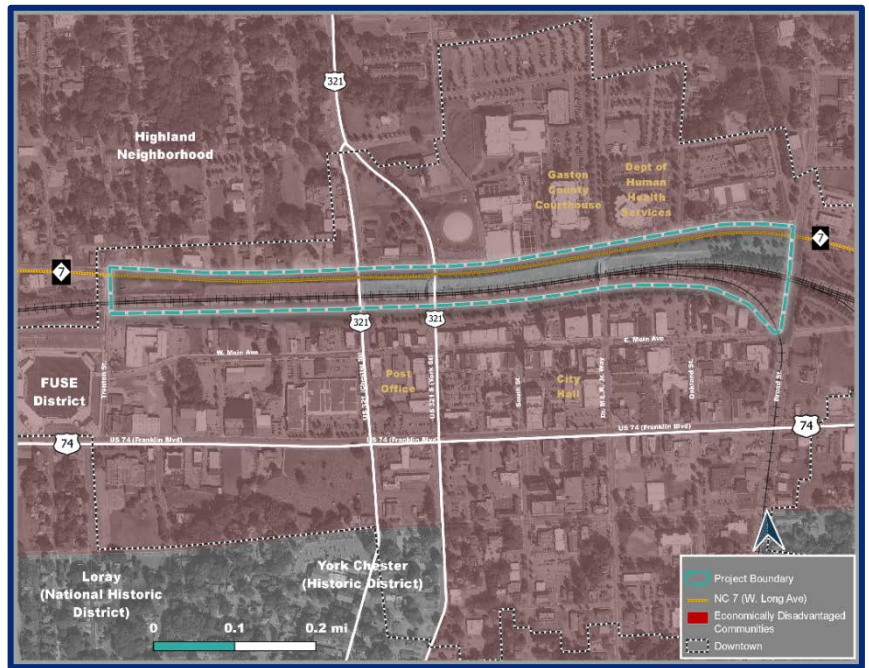
RCP 2022

Executive Summary

The City of Gastonia seeks \$2,000,000 in RCP Discretionary Planning Grant funds to complete a **feasibility study for Project CHANGE**. This study will investigate the feasibility of capping the railroad ditch that runs through Downtown Gastonia and improve NC Highway 7, both of which create a barrier to mobility, connectivity, access, and economic development for the transportation disadvantaged communities to the north. The City of Gastonia has committed a total of \$500,000 (20%) for this study. The Downtown Gastonia Reconnector Project will reconnect Census Tracts 315, 319.01, 319.02 and 320 to the Central Business District of Gastonia. Census Tracts 315, 319 (now 319.01 and 319.02) and 320 are all identified as an **Economically Disadvantaged Community**, located in a Qualified Census Tract (QCT) that is an **Area of Persistent Poverty**. The project is also **completely located in a federally designated Opportunity Zone**.

The completion of a feasibility study is imperative to understand the technical and financial implications of capping the railroad ditch while looking to maximize public benefits by way of better mobility and connectivity, and assessing various development opportunities. In addition, the feasibility study will look at ways to improve the design of NC Highway 7 (Airline/Long Avenue) to mitigate its divisive impact on the community; improving safety for pedestrians and visual and economic attractiveness for new development.

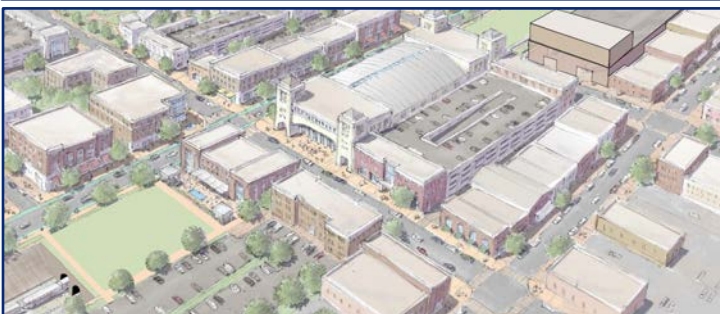
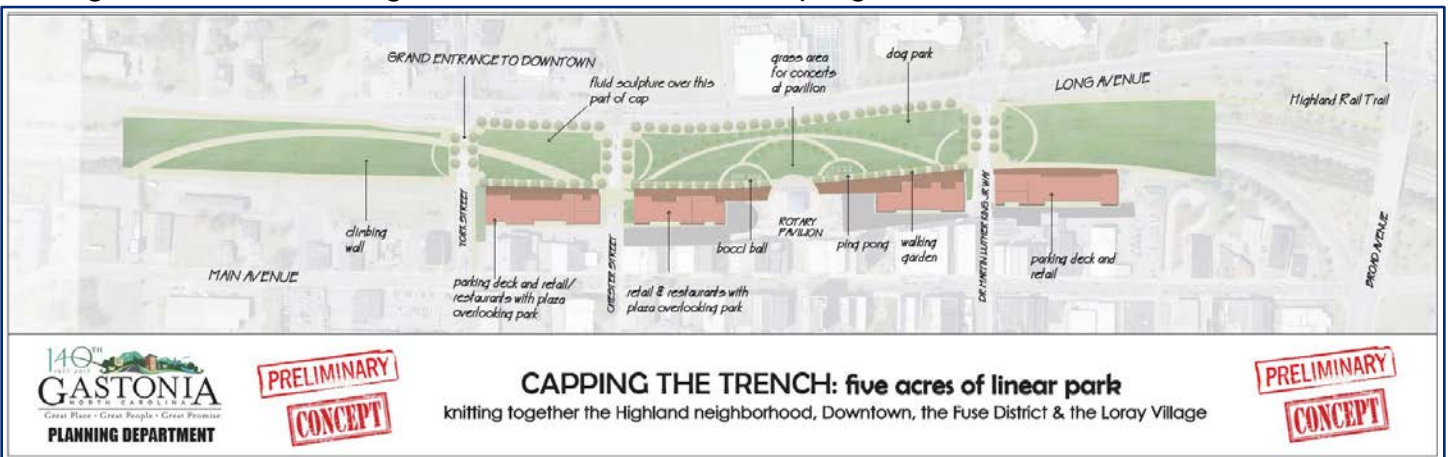
Over the last 30 years, the decline of the neighborhoods north of the railroad ditch are a direct indication of the lack of connectivity and accessibility. In addition, NC Hwy 7 (Airline/Long Ave) forms a dangerous traffic barrier to movement between the residential area to the north and the downtown. NC Hwy 7 should be recreated as a true boulevard, handling both high volume through traffic and slower neighborhood journeys by car, bicycle, and on foot - - increasing the safety for local residents while maintaining efficient traffic movement.



The **Project CHANGE Feasibility Study** process will consist of:

- Steering Committee & Stakeholder Identification
- Existing Conditions
- Community Participation Plan
- Technical Feasibility of Railroad Cap
- Highway Corridor Study
- Future Development Potential
- Peer Review: Capping Examples
- Goals & Objectives
- Opportunities & Constraints
- Financial Feasibility of Railroad Cap
- Equity Analysis
- Funding Scenarios

The City has included this concept in a number of high level corridor planning documents, but has been unable to secure the critical funding needed to complete a feasibility study to determine the methods to right the wrongs of past decisions. With the opportunity of funding through the Reconnecting Communities Pilot Grant program, the time is now!



For more information, please contact:
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