



Project CHANGE Feasibility & Connectivity Study

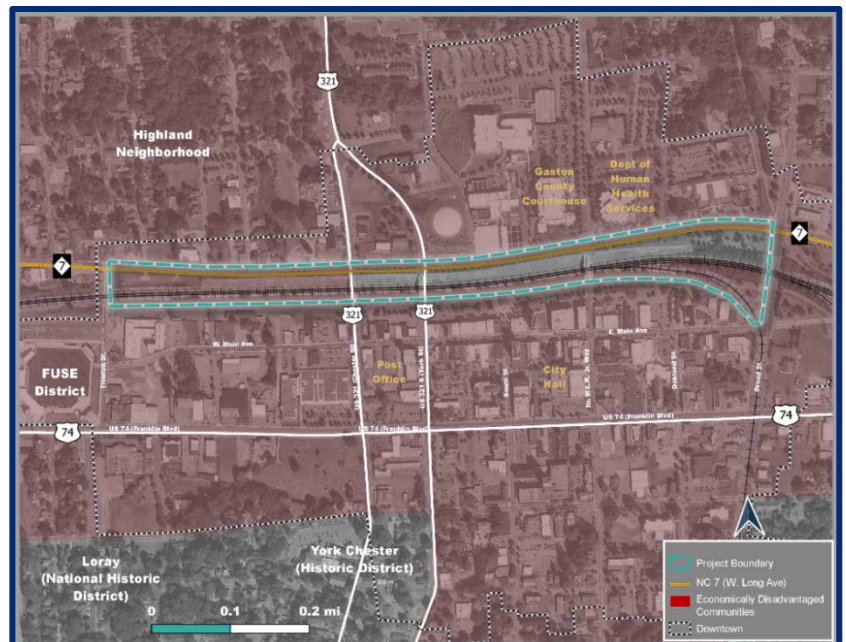
Connecting Highland: Access, Neighborhood Growth, Equity

Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Grant Program 2024

Executive Summary

The City of Gastonia seeks \$2,000,000 in Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Grant Program funds to complete a **feasibility and connectivity study for Project CHANGE**. This initiative aims to address significant barriers to mobility and economic development in one of the city's transportation-disadvantaged communities to the north of the railroad ditch that divides Downtown Gastonia from those living in the Highland Community. The Census Tracts of the affected neighborhoods include 315, 319.01, 319.02 and 320. These areas are classified as **Economically Disadvantaged Communities**, emphasizing the urgency for equitable access to resources and opportunities.

With the City of Gastonia committing \$500,000 (20%) towards this study, **Project CHANGE** proposes to investigate the feasibility of capping the railroad ditch, creating a vital link between Highland and the Central Business District (CBD). This initiative aims to transform the ditch from a barrier into a community asset, enhancing access and promoting economic revitalization. Additionally, the project emphasizes the need for safety improvements along NC Highway 7 as well as connection improvements with US 74.

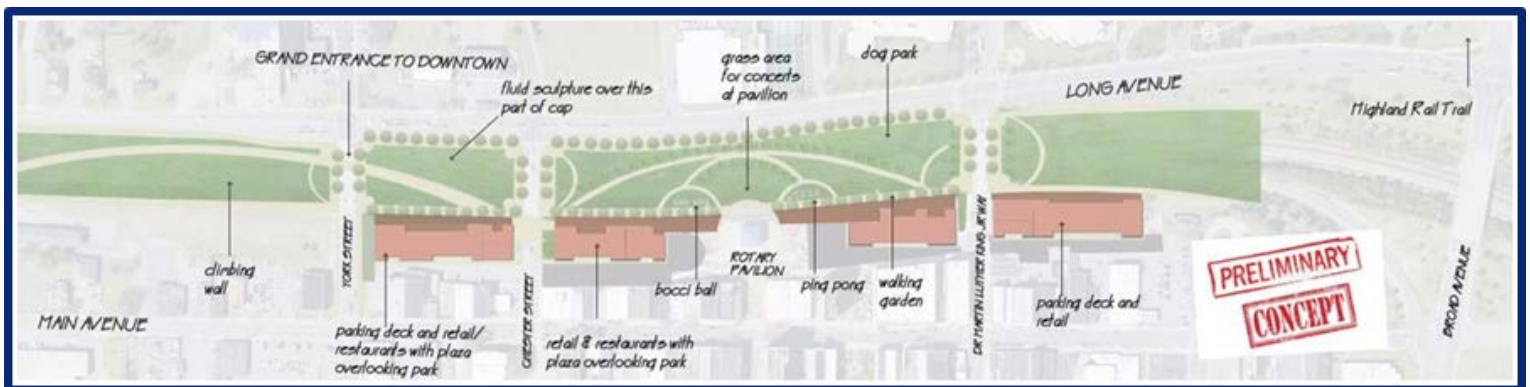


The completion of the **Project CHANGE Feasibility and Connectivity Study** is imperative to understanding the technical and financial feasibilities of capping the railroad ditch while looking to maximize public benefits by way of better mobility and connectivity. The study will also look at ways to improve the designs of NC Highway 7 (Long Avenue) and US 74 (Franklin Boulevard) to mitigate its divisive impact on the community while improving safety for bicyclists and pedestrians.

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

- Steering Committee and Stakeholder Identification
- Peer Review: National and Regional Capping Examples
- Existing Conditions
 - ✓ Site Overview
 - ✓ Land Use Patterns
 - ✓ Demographics
 - ✓ Transportation Infrastructure
 - ✓ Topography
 - ✓ Air Quality
- Goals and Objectives
 - ✓ Connectivity
 - ✓ Access
 - ✓ Health
 - ✓ Identity
 - ✓ Equity
 - ✓ Sustainability & Resiliency
- Community Participation Plan
- Technical Feasibility of Railroad Cap
- Highway Corridor Study
- Future Development Potential
- Equity Analysis
- Opportunities & Constraints
- Financial Feasibility of Railroad
- Downtown Connectivity Study
- Funding Strategy

Capping infrastructure to reconnect communities is a proven concept seen in various successful projects nationwide, transforming previously divided neighborhoods into vibrant spaces featuring parks and civic areas. The City of Gastonia has incorporated this vision into multiple planning documents, yet has faced challenges in securing necessary funding. This feasibility and connectivity study is essential for evaluating technical and financial aspects and for laying the groundwork to implement transformative changes that foster equity and connectivity in the community.



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