



**Date:** April 18, 2019

**To:** Thomas J. Bonfield, City Manager  
**Through:** Keith Chadwell, Deputy City Manager  
**From:** Bill Judge, Interim Transportation Director  
**Subject:** Downtown Durham Wayfinding Program (TIP # C-5605H)

### **Executive Summary**

The Downtown Durham Wayfinding Program is intended to help people find their way through and around Downtown, locate areas of interest including city parking, and encourage visitors to discover attractions and community assets. The program will develop new wayfinding signage throughout Downtown to replace the existing outdated system. The Transportation Department hired MERJE, a nationally recognized firm with expertise in wayfinding, to design the system. The program kicked off with an introductory stakeholder meeting and Public Open House in December 2018. An additional design-oriented public meeting, along with accompanying stakeholder meetings with community partners, was held this past February, with a corresponding online survey for those who could not attend.

Based on this public input, MERJE has developed a recommended design option for the wayfinding signage. This presentation will summarize the project development to date, present the recommended design option, and describe the upcoming project milestones.

### **Recommendation**

Staff recommends that the City Council receive a project update for the Downtown Durham Wayfinding Program and provide comments or questions.

### **Background**

The Downtown Durham Wayfinding Program is a federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funded project to design and install pedestrian and vehicular wayfinding signage to facilitate navigation to points of interest and parking in Downtown Durham. The recommendation for this program was made against a backdrop of regional efforts to reduce traffic congestion and the attendant daily car emissions of greenhouse gases by reducing visitors' search time for destinations and parking as well as encouraging exploration of the city by walking.

In 2017, a project to fund the planning, design and installation of this program was submitted to the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO) to compete for federal funding, as part of the CMAQ application process run by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), and was approved based on review of emissions reduction, expected new bicycle and/or pedestrian trips, reduction in vehicle travel miles, and cost. The City entered into a Municipal Agreement with NCDOT on March 12, 2018, as the first step towards realizing the wayfinding program initiative.

On April 16, 2018, the Transportation Department issued a Request for Letters of Interest (RFLOI) for professional firms to provide engineering and environmental graphic design services for the development of a wayfinding signage system plan. Letters of Interest (LOI) were received on May 16, 2018 from five professional engineering and graphic design firms. A selection committee reviewed the submittals and conducted interviews. Found Design, LLC (d.b.a. MERJE) emerged as the top scoring firm overall and the selection committee recommended that the contract for the design services be awarded to the firm. NCDOT issued a letter of concurrence with the consultant selection process on June 14, 2018. The City went under contract with the firm for the work on this project at its meeting on November 14, 2018 for the cost of \$139,150.00. It is estimated that the total cost of the project will be \$752,392.00.

Overview of the project is done in three groups: the Steering Committee, the Stakeholder Committee, and the general community. The Steering Committee consists of staff that are directly involved with managing the project and coordinating with MERJE, and includes members of the Transportation Department, City-County Planning, Downtown Durham, Inc., and Discover Durham. The Stakeholder Committee involves representatives of any Downtown destinations or events, approving City agencies, strategic partners, and other interested parties affected by the project. These include the Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce, the Carolina Theatre, the Durham Performing Arts Center, the Durham Bulls, American Tobacco Campus, Durham Farmers Market, Duke University, North Carolina Central University, GoDurham, NCDOT Division 5, the City's Public Works, Parks and Recreation, and General Services Departments, the Office of Economic Workforce and Development, City of Durham Police Department, Durham County Engineering and Environmental Services Department, Durham City-County Appearance Commission, the Durham Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission, the Historic Preservation Commission, the Mayor's Committee for Persons with Disabilities, the Mayor's Hispanic/Latino Committee, and NIS PAC 5. A list of stakeholders is included with this memo as Attachment 1.

The kickoff Open House for the wayfinding program was held on December 12, 2018, at City Hall, and an additional Public Meeting was held on February 20, 2019, at the Durham Armory. The purpose of the December kickoff meeting was to introduce the wayfinding project to the community and to receive initial input. The February meeting was specifically held to receive feedback on specific signage design, where three separate design options that were based on assessments from the December meeting, were presented for the community to review. This meeting was supplemented with an online survey for anybody who could not attend any of the Open Houses to view concepts, answer questions, and provide comments. The online survey, along with all other meeting material, was posted on the department's project webpage, located at <https://durhamnc.gov/3828/Downtown-Durham-Wayfinding-Project>. MERJE considered the feedback received from the online survey and from the February Meeting in the development of a recommended signage design. This new option is mainly a combination of preferred elements identified by the community, from the previous three options. This additional design option is included in the presentation in Attachment 2.

### **Issues and Analysis**

Project Area: The CMAQ application identified Downtown Durham as the project area given its tremendous growth, traffic congestion, visitor attraction and a corresponding increase in wayfinding needs. While the Downtown Durham Development Tier as identified in the Durham's Comprehensive Plan provides the project extent boundary, the design of the wayfinding program shall ensure easy program expandability and updatability to respond to future downtown growth and wayfinding needs.

**Project Timeline:** The planning and design phase of the project commenced in late 2018 and is anticipated to continue through 2019. Environmental approval is expected to occur during the summer, and final construction authorization is expected in the fall, with subsequent advertisement for construction. The project should be completed in 2020. The federal funding source associated with this project is subject to rescission if construction authorization is not received by September 30, 2019. Meeting this deadline is critically important for the project schedule.

**Eligible Expenses:** CMAQ funding for planning and design must be directly connected to what is constructed. Therefore, what is designed and built in this project may not be a full and complete wayfinding system but a first phase of a system that could be expanded in the future. Additionally, CMAQ-eligible expenses are limited to wayfinding design and installation only. Other wayfinding-related aspects could be considered for design and installation in the future.

### **Alternatives**

The City Council may choose not to provide comments for this project.

### **Financial Impact**

Total funding for this project is \$695,750, consisting of \$556,600 of federal funding and \$139,150 of local funding. These funds are in the adopted CIP ordinance. In addition, the DCHC MPO has approved an additional \$45,313 of federal funding in the TIP with an additional \$11,329 of local match to be provided through CIP close-out funding. A future agenda item will bring forward a supplemental municipal agreement and CIP ordinance amendment to add these funds to the project.

### **UBE Summary**

This is not applicable for this informational update to City Council.

### **Staff Contact**

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### **Attachments**

1. Stakeholder Committee List
2. Presentation