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Infrastructure reimbursements for Camp North End, River District approved by Charlotte City Council

By Ashley Fahey



Arguably two of Charlotte's most transformative real estate projects got the green light from Charlotte City Council to receive public dollars to help pay for road improvements in conjunction with private development of the sites.

Camp North End, a redevelopment project by ATCO Properties & Management, was approved to receive up to \$15 million from the city's Community Investment Plan for road projects around the decades-old site.

ATCO's plans to reimagine the 75-acre site at the former Rite Aid distribution center on Statesville Avenue are significant. The New York developer last week won rezoning for the site to allow a mixture of uses, including office space; light industrial; retail services; eating, drinking and entertainment establishments; and residential units.

"It's a phenomenal space and has so much to offer to the community," said Mayor Pro Tem Vi Lyles, adding it was important to "retain the flavor" of the neighborhood in the project. "I would like to ask planning staff what we can do to protect those around those developments to make sure people who live around there can enjoy that experience."

Camp North End could generate \$1.7 million in annual property tax revenue, with private investment totaling \$350 million over the next 10 years, according to ATCO. Tenants including Junior Achievement of Central Carolinas, Goodyear Arts and Hygge Coworking, along with a number of retailers at the project's Boiler Yard, have signed on or are already operational at the site.

The CIP money allocated for Camp North End on Monday will reimburse ATCO for public infrastructure projects like streetscape improvements to Graham Street, Statesville Avenue and Woodward Avenue as well as the extension of Sylvania Avenue to add an east-west connection between Statesville Avenue and Graham Street.

ATCO is expected to be reimbursed upon completion of specific milestones in the project and will employ a minimum of 10% of minority-, women- and small business owners for the public infrastructure improvements as well as attaining similar levels for private infrastructure improvements, "subject to availability."

In a similar vein, the developers of the River District in west Charlotte also received unanimous support from City Council for infrastructure reimbursements.

Lincoln Harris and Crescent Communities are spearheading River District, which could include up to 8 million square feet of office, 500,000 square feet of retail, 1,000 hotel rooms, 2,300 single-family homes and 2,550 multifamily units across nearly 1,400 acres between the Catawba River and Charlotte Douglas International Airport. It's been previously touted as one of the last opportunities for significant master-planned development in Charlotte.

From the city's CIP, the developers are expected to receive up to \$16.2 million in CIP reimbursement, up to \$15 million in reimbursement from a tax increment grant and up to \$1 million from Charlotte Water's CIP. The money will help cover the cost of widening Dixie River and Garrison roads, streetscape improvements for pedestrians and bicyclists, extending West Boulevard, and building a water line.

Lyles said she's had questions about economic opportunity with a project "that's going to create almost a new city."

"Frankly, I've been very concerned about having public money going into a project for a private development to be successful," she continued, adding that she had spoken with Crescent and Lincoln Harris about MWSBE participation and economic opportunity.

Brian Leary, president of commercial and mixed-use at Crescent Communities, said specific measures had been taken to hold the developers accountable — the development will be done in phases, for instance, that will allow the city to monitor the project's progress and ensure certain goals are being met before public money for future infrastructure improvements is allocated.

"Infrastructure is so important to build out this robust and inclusive place," Leary said. He said that in addition to the public infrastructure being built with 10% of MWSBE participation, the private infrastructure side is working to have the same goal.

A third-party consultant has also been hired to keep track of the project and will give yearly reports, Leary said.

"Every year, we'll report and reference how we're doing — if we haven't lived up to our side, you have the ability to stop future phases," he said.

Council member Ed Driggs noted that the CIP money for River District had previously been allocated for the Dixie-Berryhill area and that the reimbursement "harmonizes" planned infrastructure improvements and private development.

"I think the leverage is tremendous here and I really appreciate the work the developers have done to give us a concept that's large scale, coordinated and isn't piecemeal sprawl," Driggs said.

City Council's vote on both Camp North End and River District authorizes the city manager to negotiate and execute agreements for the reimbursements.