91 Riverside Leasing Opportunity Proposal Summary

Summary Statement

Following a Request for Proposals (RFP) process, RiverLink, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, submitted a proposal for a 15-year public-purpose lease to transform 91 Riverside Drive, a vacant, one-acre brownfield, into a flood-resilient public preserve. The proposal aims to facilitate the adaptive reuse of the property as a community asset by integrating ecological restoration, green infrastructure, and public art, without requiring capital from the City of Asheville's General Fund. RiverLink will assume full responsibility for project coordination, fundraising, and long-term site maintenance.

Site Activation Plan

Transform the one-acre parcel into a nature-led public preserve without enclosed building structures, utilizing above-ground green stormwater infrastructure (Bioswales, cisterns, planter boxes) and preserving the historic smokestack. The linear parcel will be divided into three distinct operational sections:

- **Southern Portion (Habitat):** Dedicated to urban forest and meadow restoration. This section focuses on invasive species removal to restore an urban forest and meadow habitat that serves as a dedicated wildlife habitat without direct public access.
- **Middle Portion (Activation):** Centered around the historic smokestack, a small wetland, and concrete remnants. Plans include clearing invasive plants, adding public access points, and adding professional murals or art features such as a large-scale art installation developed with Echoes of the Forest.
- **Northern Portion (Arts Collaboration):** Reserved for a future sculpture garden or interactive art installation led by local arts partners. RiverLink will actively maintain the landscape to ensure a cared-for appearance while partners secure funding for art installations.

Site and Regulatory Constraints

- **Structures:** No enclosed or building structures are proposed, effectively avoiding floodplain elevation and fill requirements.
- **Brownfields Compliance:** Site improvements will utilize only above-ground green stormwater infrastructure (e.g., bioswales, cisterns, planter boxes) to avoid subsurface excavation and maintain compliance with the active Brownfields Agreement.
- **Historic Preservation:** The historic smokestack will be preserved as a landmark, with restricted public access to prevent structural risk.
- **Right-of-Way:** The project design complies with the 50’x250’ buildable wedge and the restriction against vertical structures in the railroad right-of-way.

Project Timeline

- **Days 1-90:** Conduct site analysis, initiate site preparation, and begin invasive plant removal across the parcel.
- **Winter 2026-2027:** Finalize design and clear the middle section to establish initial public access.
- **Early 2027:** Commence restoration of the southern section habitat.
- **Mid-Summer 2027:** Open the center section amenities to the public.

- **Ongoing through 2027:** Prepare the northern section for arts partner installations pending their independent funding and permitting timelines.

Strategic Alignment:

The proposal and site activation support the City Council's FY26 priorities for Infrastructure & Environment, Economy, and People without requiring additional City investment. The project serves as an adaptive-reuse catalyst for the Wilma Dykeman RiverWay, through activation, open space, and public access.

The proposal also directly responds to the community-led Sasaki UnifiedRAD Resilience + Visioning Plan and the Urban Land Institute (ULI) report, which recommended flood-resilient, nature-led spaces integrated with public art for post-Helene recovery.

Funding and Proposed Lease:

RiverLink estimates total capital improvements between $100,000 and $250,000, supported by grant funding, including a $25,000 upfront commitment from RiverLink's Board. This project will require no contribution from the City's general fund.

The proposal requests a 15-year public-purpose lease to support the complete vision and activation of the site. Additionally, the 15-year lease matches the horizon for the highest flood risk, which is a 95% chance of flooding within 15 years. This allows evaluation of flooding on the site during this time to determine options for future use. This timeframe also accounts for the nearby I-26 construction completion timeline, allowing for evaluation of the impact of construction and the expanded Wilma Dykeman Greenway to the north.