Request for Proposals:
Leasing Opportunity for 91 Riverside Drive

298-FY27-HED-RFP-91RiversideDrLeasingOpp

Issue Date: July 20, 2026

Due Date: August 31, 2026 (No later than 5:00 PM EDT)

Contact Information:

- **Contact:** Rachel Taylor, Economic Development Division Manager
- **Department:** Housing and Economic Development Department
- **Email:** rtaylor@ashevillenc.gov

Background and Project History

Following the catastrophic impacts of Tropical Storm Helene in September 2024, the City of Asheville is positioned at a critical juncture in its post-disaster recovery efforts. **91 Riverside Drive** (PIN: 963897369400000) is a City-owned, vacant, 1.03-acre site situated in the heart of the River Arts District. The property represents a unique opportunity to operationalize a "Live With the River" activation philosophy. The City is seeking a partnership with a for-profit or non-profit entity to develop and implement a low-impact, resilient open-space activation strategy for the site.

The site at 91 Riverside Drive has a complex industrial and civic history that directly informs its current potential use parameters. Prior to 2012, the property housed an industrial ice house. As the traditional industrial base of the riverfront declined, the structure fell into neglect. Recognizing the safety hazards and the strategic value of the riverfront, the City of Asheville purchased the property in 2012 for $625,000. The primary structure was demolished, but the brick smokestack was preserved, and potential uses were defined by an active Brownfields Agreement.

Between 2014 and 2020, the site was the focus of affordable housing efforts. Following the unprecedented flooding from Tropical Storm Helene in September 2024, the City of Asheville is now considering a 'lowest-cost-of-loss' strategy and seeking non-residential approaches for strategic site investment.

The City is deploying a strategic long-term lease model to function as a vital economic bridge for the recovering creative economy. This timeline allows the City to retain land control and evaluate the long-term hydrologic impacts of the river corridor, the completion of the NCDOT I-26 bridge project, and the expansion of the Wilma Dykeman Greenway before making permanent, capital-intensive land-use decisions.

Alignment with Relevant City Plans and Projects

Successful proposals must demonstrate deep alignment with established community visions, including:

- **Asheville City Council FY26 Strategic Priorities:** Proposal must align with the Council's Priorities, including "Economy" – supporting local business and workforce recovery, and "Infrastructure and Environment" – environmental sustainability and climate/neighborhood resilience.
- **The Wilma Dykeman RiverWay Master Plan:** Proposals must align with this plan, focusing on environmental reclamation, scenic preservation, continuous public pedestrian connectivity, and economic development that demonstrates environmental responsibility, and celebrate the river as a treasure.
- **French Broad River Parks Recovery Project:** Focusing on low-impact, flood-tolerant activations that support the broader ecosystem.

Alignment with Mutual Interest / Community Visions

Successful proposals ***may*** also reference community visions, including:

- **ULI Advisory Services Panel:** Proposals may demonstrate alignment with these findings, including how they intend to support a "destination stewardship" model that

emphasizes physical activations serving permanent local residents first and utilizing modular, flood-tolerant designs. Final ULI Report Final ULI Presentation
- **Unified RAD Resilience Plan** Proposals may demonstrate alignment with these findings by prioritizing the "Live With the River" principle through designs that adapt to water cycles.

Site Description

91 Riverside Drive is a publicly owned riverfront parcel located in the heart of the River Arts District (RAD). Positioned on the eastern bank of the French Broad River corridor, this site offers the unique opportunity to deliver a landmark project that synthesizes economic vitality, artistic culture, and advanced climate-resilient urban design.

As a key site within the RAD-RIV (Riverfront, Sub-District RIV2) zone, the property represents a critical asset for Asheville's post-disaster economic recovery. See Exhibit A for a site map.

Site Parameters and Physical Constraints

- **Floodplain Elevation Limits:**
  - The property is entirely within the 100-year floodplain. All proposed uses must prioritize resilience and recognize the river's natural ebb and flow.
  - The 1.03-acre parcel sits entirely within the 100-year floodplain with a Base Flood Elevation (BFE) of 1,982 feet. To comply with federal and municipal standards, any enclosed habitable space must be elevated to 1,984 feet (BFE plus a 2-foot freeboard). Furthermore, all proposed uses must comply with permitting and documentation as set forth in 7-12-1 of the City Ordinances.
  - Proposers should note that importing fill to meet this height is highly discouraged due to negative impacts on street-level pedestrian interaction, ADA accessibility, and hydrologic flow.
- **Buildable Footprint:**
  - The buildable footprint is restricted to a tight 50-foot by 250-foot 'wedge' between municipal road setbacks and the adjacent railroad right-of-way (RR ROW). No vertical structures of any kind are permitted within the RR ROW.
- **Active Brownfield Agreement:**
  - The site is subject to an active NCDEQ Brownfields Agreement (Brownfields Plat). All activities must strictly comply with the terms of this agreement.
  - All physical interventions must minimize or eliminate subsurface soil excavation to prevent the leaching or migration of historical industrial contaminants. Above-ground green stormwater infrastructure (e.g., bioswales, cisterns, planter boxes) must be used.
- **Historic Smokestack Structural Buffer:**
  - The property contains a historic brick smokestack, which represents a significant preservation asset and structural liability. A successful proposal will demonstrate awareness of the structural considerations of the smokestack and include it in its proposed mitigation/safety plan. Tenants must ensure activities do not deteriorate or harm the smokestack or contribute to structural risk.
- **Stormwater Requirements:** Proposed uses must meet all City stormwater management standards.

Leasing Goals

Economic Revitalization

Proposals must demonstrate how the tenant will act as a **catalyst for the RAD's recovery**. This includes:

- Advancing the district's economic vitality by providing a new activation for the site that is appropriate and supportive of the district's economic recovery.
- Leveraging partnerships with regional entities (for example, district organizations, environmental organizations, arts organizations, and others) to activate the site in a manner that supports a unified vision for the riverfront.

Revitalization Progress and Accountability

The City seeks an active partner who will provide regular reporting on site progress. The selected partner will be contractually required to submit periodic progress reports to the Housing and Economic Development Department, documenting progress. This includes:

- Detailing funding sought and secured for site improvements.
- Documenting community participation.
- Providing updates on the construction or implementation process.

Lease Options and Statutory Frameworks

Statutory Frameworks

All lease agreements must comply with guidelines established by the City's Lease Policy.

Option 1: Standard Municipal Lease, Less than 10 years

A multi-year lease option that is open to both for-profit and non-profit entities.
Under G.S. 160A-272, to maintain broad eligibility for both for-profit enterprises and non-profit organizations, the lease term is set at an initial term of five (5) years with one (1) optional five-year renewal extension (10 years maximum cumulative). Rental rates under a standard lease must comply with market rates, unless otherwise agreed to by the City

In-Kind Consideration Justification: If proposing a nominal lease rate, the applicant must include a detailed operational budget that quantifies (1) value of the in-kind services provided to demonstrate that the value equals or exceeds the property's assessed leasehold value, and/or (2) the specific public purpose intended for lease, as further described in Section V. C. 3. of the City's Lease Policy.

Option 2: Public Purpose Long-Term Lease, up to 15 years

A **multi-year lease option of greater than 10 years is restricted to non-profit organizations carrying out a public purpose (see N.C.G.S. §160A-279.)** Under this statutory pathway, the lease will contain strict public-use covenants and a mandatory reversionary clause dictating that the property leasehold will immediately terminate and revert to the City if the non-profit ceases

to provide the specified public benefits. Those public benefits shall be proposed by the applicant and will be further refined in coordination with the City's legal department.

Submission Requirements

Submissions must not exceed ten (10) pages and should include:

1. **Cover Letter**: Highlighting unique qualifications.
    a. The cover letter should serve as the introduction to your proposal and to your organization.
    b. Describe what makes you uniquely qualified to activate 91 Riverside Drive.
2. **Organization Qualifications:** Description of staff, history, and commitment to their ability to meet the leasing goals.
    a. Describe your organization and the key staff members who will be involved in the project.
    b. Indicate how long your organization has been operating and list some of your notable accomplishments.
    c. Indicate whether you are a non-profit or a for-profit organization. If applicable, document your non-profit status. Describe your organization's commitment to and/or approach to activation, economic revitalization, and site revitalization.
3. **Project Description:** Specific details on planned activities, how they align with the Wilma Dykeman and other relevant plans, and how they advance district economic revitalization.
    a. Describe in specific detail the proposed improvements and activities that you are planning for this site. Which staff members or groups will be operating at this site?
    b. Indicate which customers or groups your organization serves. Indicate how you would further the overall City's vision and the vision for the River Arts District.
4. **Partnership Strategy:** Explanation of how the applicant will leverage external partners to maximize impact at no cost to the City.
5. **Lease Terms and Offer:** Desired term and proposed rental rate
    a. If for-profit entity, the total lease term must not exceed 10 years and must offer a rental rate that reflects the fair market value of the property
    b. If non-profit entity seeking to perform a public purpose, the proposed term may be extended for up to 15 years total, and the rental rate of less than fair market value can be proposed, in alignment with the provision below:
        i. According to the *City's Real Estate Lease Policy for City-Owned Land,* under specific circumstances, the City will consider non-monetary forms of rental payments if measurable public benefits are being provided. If seeking a rental reduction, the prospective tenant should include in their lease proposal the ways they will provide public benefit services and, specifically, how they will serve a public purpose. The proposal should describe in detail how performance will be measured or quantified, and how it will align with the City Council's Strategic Goals.
6. **Operational Timeline:** Explanation of the plan to become operational, accounting for the target start date of November 1, 2026, pending due diligence activities.
    a. Summarize and outline how long it will take for your group to become operational once a lease has been signed. Keep in mind that the current proposed start date of this lease is November 1, 2026.

A mandatory site visit will be held **on August 04, 2026, at 12:00 PM**. To register, please email Rachel Taylor at rtaylor@ashevillenc.gov.

Any and all questions related to this RFP are due to Rachel Taylor at rtaylor@ashevillenc.gov no later than **4:00 p.m. E.D.T on August 12, 2026**.

Proposals must be submitted via email to Rachel Taylor at rtaylor@ashevillenc.gov no later than **5:00 p.m. E.D.T on August 31, 2026**. These submissions should not exceed ten (10) pages.

Timeline

Activity	**Date**
Request for Proposals issued by City	**July 20, 2026**
Mandatory Site Visit	**August 04, 2026**
Deadline for questions	**August 12, 2026 by 4:00 PM EDT**
Answers to questions posted	**August 21, 2026**
Deadline for submissions	**August 31, 2026 by 5:00 PM EDT**
Review completed by City staff	**September 18, 2026**
City Council Vote	**October 2026**
Leasing Start Date (*Pending agreement approval and execution.*)	**November 1, 2026**

Selection Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated on a 100-point scale based on the following criteria:

- **Compatibility with Vision (Relevant recovery and steady-state projects and plans):** 30 points
- **Economic Revitalization Impact (Advancing revitalization):** 30 points
- **Experience and Capacity (Independent operation):** 25 points
- **Alignment with City Council Strategic Goals:** 15 points

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Compatibility with City's Vision of the River Arts District: 30 points

The way in which the site is used should fit into the City's vision for the property. The RAD is an arts community with a unique position on the French Broad River.

Enhance the Economic Development of the District: 30 points
The new tenant will accomplish this by adding new, appropriate uses and contributing to the district's identity.

Organizational Capacity and Experience: 25 points
The successful applicant should be able to meet all terms and conditions of a finalized lease agreement. The applicant should have a proven track record of providing the service or product identified.

Alignment with City Council Strategic Goals: 15 points
The approved applicant's operational model or organization's mission will align with the Asheville City Council's Strategic Goals for the City.

Resources
Relevant City Plans and Documents
- Asheville City Council FY26 Strategic Priorities
- The Wilma Dykeman RiverWay Master Plan
- French Broad River Parks Recovery Project
- Brownfields Agreement and Brownfields Plat

Community Plans
- ULI Advisory Services Panel: Final ULI Report, Final ULI Presentation
- Unified RAD Resilience Plan

Site Resources
- Photo Gallery of 91 Riverside Drive
- Map of 91 Riverside Drive, also shown in Exhibit A below.

Submission Disclaimer
The City may, at its sole discretion, request that proposers supplement their qualifications with additional information following initial submittal. The City reserves the right to reject any or all proposals submitted, to cancel this RFP, and/or to modify and reissue the RFP at any time. Pursuant to the North Carolina Public Records Act, all documents submitted in response to this RFP will be considered public records and will be made available to the public upon request.

Exhibit A: Map

