RESOLUTION NO. 20-_____

RESOLUTION REGARDING THE NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION I-26 CONNECTOR TIP PROJECT-2513

WHEREAS, the North Carolina Department of Transportation ("NC DOT") has issued a Final Environmental Impact Statement ("FEIS") for the I-26 Connector Project, TIP Project I-2513 ("the project"); and

WHEREAS, NCDOT is seeking public input on the FEIS; and

WHEREAS, the City of Asheville is providing comments to NCDOT on the FEIS through a letter and this resolution; and

WHEREAS, the I-26 and I-240 corridors are critical to local and regional residents, visitors, interstate travelers, and regional commerce; and

WHEREAS, the project has been in the planning since the late 1980s; and

WHEREAS, traffic congestion and safety are continuing challenges along I-240 and I-26 through Asheville; and

WHEREAS, the Asheville community has long advocated through various efforts - from the Community Coordinating Committee report in 2000 that laid out key design principles, to the I26 Group that fought the proposed eight lanes in West Asheville, to the 2008 Asheville Design Center efforts that gave rise to Alternative 4B, to the I-26 ConnectUs Project that has advocated similar design principles since 2009, to every City Council-adopted resolution on this project – that the project be smaller and less impactful, have better bike/pedestrian connectivity, separate interstate from local traffic and return Patton Avenue to a surface street; and

WHEREAS, the City of Asheville and NCDOT have worked together in the I-26 Working Group since 2016 to address a range of issues raised in Resolution 15-232, adopted by City Council on December 8, 2015; and

WHEREAS, the City of Asheville appreciates the collaboration and hard work that NCDOT has put into the I-26 Working Group and NCDOT's willingness to adopt several changes to the project; and

WHEREAS, as reflected in Resolution 16-163, adopted by City Council on July 5, 2016, the selection of Alt. 4B as the preferred alternative honored the preference of the City of Asheville and enabled the City's priority of returning Patton Ave. to a surface street, thus allowing for the creation of a new gateway into downtown and an urban, multi-modal boulevard with new, infill development – all of which will help Asheville grow sustainably and create opportunities for economic investment and development; and

WHEREAS, Alt. 4B also had the least amount of impact on the Burton Street community and provides the opportunity for a new connection from Hillcrest directly to Patton Ave; and

WHEREAS, the final maps and FEIS reflect other improvements to the project sought by the City of Asheville as a result of the I-26 Working Group's efforts, including a reduction in the overall size and impact of the project on neighborhoods and businesses in West Asheville due to the selection of a six-lane alternative for I-240, an improved Brevard Rd-Amboy-Rd interchange, full connectivity at the I-240/I-40/I-26 interchange with the smallest footprint and other design improvements that have significantly reduced the number of houses and businesses taken; and

WHEREAS, other improvements include improved community connectivity through five miles of new and expanded bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure throughout the project corridor that will better and more safely connect people to downtown, West Asheville, the French Broad River, and numerous neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, there remain outstanding design elements along the Patton Avenue Corridor and the Jeff Bowen Bridge yet to be adopted by NCDOT that are reflected in a memo dated September 19, 2018 from Sam Schwartz Consulting LLC to Ken Putnam (the "Schwartz Memo"), specifically including redesigning the interchange on the east side of the bridge and ensuring the westbound bridge has only two travel lanes and a generous bike and pedestrian path; and

WHEREAS, securing NCDOT's commitment to incorporate the designs advanced in the Schwartz Memo is critical to achieving the City of Asheville's long-standing goal of turning the Patton Avenue Corridor into a dense, urban, multi-modal, mixed-use corridor; and

WHEREAS, there remain other opportunities to tighten the footprint of all intersections between surface roads and the interstate throughout the project in order to make roads safer for cyclists and pedestrians and to possibly further reduce impacts on homes and businesses; and

WHEREAS, there remain unresolved design issues regarding the size of new I-26 bridge over the French Broad River and of the interstate as it travels north to the Broadway exit; the size, height, and expanse of the I-240 flyover bridges; and the visual and auditory impacts of the project on the historic Riverside Cemetery and the adjacent Montford neighborhood; and

WHEREAS, City Council appointed the I-26 Connector Project Aesthetics Committee ("Aesthetics Committee") in order to study carefully the aesthetic conditions within the project and make recommendations for their improvement; and

WHEREAS, the City of Asheville and the Aesthetics Committee have received assurances from NCDOT that the approved recommendations of the Aesthetics Committee ("the Aesthetic Recommendations") will be incorporated into the design-build Request for Proposals and into the design-build contract for the project and reflected in the final design of the project; and

WHEREAS, the City of Asheville seeks a continued close working relationship with NCDOT and its design-build contractor on the ongoing design of and aesthetic improvements to this project and appreciates NCDOT's commitment to that ongoing relationship;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ASHEVILLE THAT:

1. The City of Asheville calls on NC DOT to continue collaborating with the I-26 Working Group to develop improved designs for the east side of the Patton Avenue Corridor and the Jeff Bowen Bridge and incorporate those into the Record of Decision or the Request for Proposals; and

2. The City of Asheville further calls on NC DOT and its future design-build contractor to further reduce the size and impact of the project by:

    a. tightening the footprint of all urban intersections throughout the project corridor, specifically including the Haywood Road interchange;
    b. reducing the number of lanes on the new I-26 bridge over the river and continuing north to the Broadway exit;
    c. reducing the height and radius of the I-240 flyover bridges; and
    d. reducing the visual and auditory impacts on Riverside Cemetery and the adjacent Montford neighborhood; and

3. The City of Asheville further calls on NCDOT, with regard to the Request for Proposals and Aesthetic Recommendations, that:

    a. NCDOT evaluate the design team qualifications, not only for multi-disciplinary representation to include urban planning, bridge design, structural engineering and landscape architecture, but also for demonstrated experience implementing creative transportation solutions that are contextually sensitive to both the natural environment and the urban character of a scenic destination city such as Asheville;
    b. Substantial weight be assigned in RFP evaluation criteria to the qualifications of the responder's design team as described above;
    c. NCDOT include in its RFP an Aesthetics Scope of Work ("ASW") reflecting the Aesthetics Recommendations;
    d. NCDOT include the City in the RFP development and revision process;

e. the proposals submitted be evaluated on the degree to which they achieve the goals and objectives of the ASW and any additional improvements and betterments; and
f. the City be allowed to review and comment on the responses to the RFP; and

4. The City further calls on NCDOT and the design-build contractor to consider any new land use, greenway, or other plans or design proposals developed after the Record of Decision is signed that impact or relate to the project; and

5. The City further calls on NCDOT and the design-build contractor to utilize local businesses and residents to the greatest degree possible in the construction of the project; and

6. The City of Asheville further calls on NCDOT to work together to determine a suitable use for land underneath new bridges in the project so that land is put to use for the benefit of Asheville residents; and

7. The City of Asheville further calls on NCDOT to support the City's acquisition of available right of way in the Patton Avenue Corridor in a "development-ready" state to further the redevelopment of that corridor as envisioned by the City; and

8. The City of Asheville be considered a key partner with NCDOT and the design-build contractor and that NCDOT consult with the City during the contract period on all aesthetic and design modifications, giving full consideration to the City's views.

Read, approved and adopted this the 24th day of March, 2020.

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City Clerk Mayor

Approved as to form:

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City Attorney