

**Item Title:** NC Freedom Park Project Funding Commitment

**Specific Action Requested:**  
**That the Board of Commissioners:**

- 1. Affirms the November 13, 2017 commitment of \$25,000 to support the North Carolina Freedom Park Project;**
- 2. Commits an additional \$100,000 to support the project subject to the terms and conditions outlined below; and**
- 3. Approves a \$100,000 budget adjustment within the Community Capital element of the Capital Improvement Plan from General Community Planned Projects to the Freedom Park Project.**

**Item Summary:**

**Purpose:** The Board of Commissioners appropriates funds for capital projects and must approve budget adjustments above policy thresholds.

**Background:** The purpose of the NC Freedom Park Project is to construct a commemorative park in downtown Raleigh to celebrate the contributions of African Americans in North Carolina toward a better society and to reflect the importance of full freedom for every citizen and the sanctity of justice and equality. The park is to be located on state-owned land between the State Legislative Building and the Governor's Mansion. The project is led by a non-profit organization that is seeking to raise a total of \$5 million to support construction and initial programming for the project.

The project, first envisioned in 2001, conducted a ceremonial groundbreaking in October 2020 after working with state and local government and private donors to raise \$3.5 million towards the full project cost and gaining a commitment from the State of North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources to accept responsibility to operate the park once construction is fully completed. Due to escalating construction costs and full build-out goals of the non-profit organization, the NC Freedom Park Board is requesting a total commitment of \$250,000 towards the park project. Wake County staff is recommending a total commitment of \$125,000 towards the project. The Board is requested to affirm their 2017 commitment of \$25,000 from Community Capital funding and support an additional commitment of \$100,000 from Community Capital reserves (General Community Planned Projects).

**Board Goal:** This action supports Economic Strength Goal 4: Support, promote and celebrate arts and culture.

Fiscal Impact: Wake County's \$125,000 funding commitment will be provided through the Community Capital element of the Capital Improvement Plan after a \$100,000 budget adjustment from General Community Planned Projects to the Freedom Park Project.

**Additional Information:**

In 2002, a group formed to explore the absence of public spaces in North Carolina commemorating the African American's struggle for freedom and dignity. In 2004, a non-profit was organized to create a grassroots endeavor to determine purpose, place, and financing for this effort. In 2016, renowned architect Phill Freelon and his design team were chosen to design the park. Freelon's design featured African American "voices of freedom" embedded in walkways and at its focus point, a gleaming, illuminated, and towering beacon of Freedom. The 1-acre park includes grassy areas to reflect and gather spots for education and cultural events, especially for school-aged groups learning about state history.

In October 2017, the City of Raleigh and Wake County received a request to each provide \$25,000 to support the NC Freedom Park Project to help kick-off the project's fundraising efforts. Since that time, the project has secured a lease extension with the state of North Carolina, successfully raised \$1.9 million from local government and the private sector, and in July 2020 secured a \$1.5 million funding commitment from the State of North Carolina. In October 2020, the project conducted a ceremonial groundbreaking.

Since the project was in early development, the County's funding commitment included several conditions before funding would be provided to the project. Among other requirements, conditions included a requirement that project construction begin within 18 months and the project completed within 36 months. Although the timeline was not met, communication was provided to the County that demonstrated progress toward the project. Due to this demonstration of progress, the County's funding remained available but would need to be affirmed by the Board when the project was ready.

Since the initial Board commitment in 2017, construction costs have escalated and the Park leaders are requesting additional support from Wake County, the City of Raleigh, and their private donors to cover the additional costs. Both Wake County and the City of Raleigh are requested to provide commitments of \$250,000 each.

Staff recommends an additional \$100,000 contribution towards the project, for a total project commitment of \$125,000. It is recommended that the commitment include the following conditions:

- The NC Freedom Park Project maintains an active lease with the State of North Carolina;
- The State of North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources maintains their commitment to accept the park as gift and provide ongoing maintenance and programming;
- Project construction begins within 12 months of Board commitment and is scheduled to be completed within 24 months.

If approved, Wake County's \$125,000 funding commitment will be provided through the Community Capital element of the Capital Improvement Plan after a \$100,000 budget adjustment from General Community Planned Projects to the Freedom Park Project occurs. The FY21 Adopted Budget included \$100,000 for General Community Planned Projects to address growing community infrastructure development needs, typically selected on a case by case basis.

<b>Element</b>	<b>Project</b>	<b>Current Appropriation</b>	<b>Reallocation/ Appropriation</b>	<b>Revised Appropriation</b>
Community Capital	General Community Planned Projects	\$100,000	(\$100,000)	-
Community Capital	Freedom Park	\$25,000	\$100,000	\$125,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$125,000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$125,000</b>

The Board of Commissioners received a presentation on this request at the June 14, 2021 Work Session.

**Attachments:**

1. Presentation from the June 14, 2021 Work Session
2. Item Summary from November 2017