

# The City of Whiteville

## Mollie's Branch Stream Restoration and Infrastructure Improvements Project

***Project Update and Engagement Follow-up*** | September 16, 2024

The Mollie's Branch Stream Restoration Project (the "Project") is part of a broader effort to utilize nature-based solutions for flood mitigation in the City of Whiteville (the "City").

### PROJECT STATUS

Grants have been either secured or committed from the Golden Leaf Foundation, the North Carolina Division of Emergency Management (NCEM), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to design and construct this project. The project is currently in the design / engineering and permitting phase. The submission of final construction documents to FEMA for review is anticipated in the Spring of 2025, with construction monies to be released following FEMA's approval of the final drawings and permits.

The proposed designs remain consistent with the goals and intent of the schematic designs and public feedback received as part of the "Whiteville Floodprint" effort (final report published by the NC State University CDDL in April 2023 and adopted by the City in May 2023, available for download here: <https://www.coastaldynamicsdesignlab.com/whiteville-floodprint>).

### COMMUNITY INPUT FROM THE MEETING ON AUGUST 19, 2024 + CITY RESPONSES

Major topics discussed include the following:

- 1) **Flooding Outside of the Project Area**: While the proposed stream restoration is expected to reduce flood heights by as much as three (3) feet during larger storm events, these benefits are specific to the areas immediately adjacent to the stream (from Washington Street to Virgil Street along Mollie's Branch). However, the City understands that: (i) many others outside of the immediate project area are impacted by flooding as well; and (ii) previous 'buyout zones' declared by the State of North Carolina do not fully capture the extent of homes impacted by floods. ***The City will continue to work with residents in these additional areas of flooding to hear concerns, and will work toward solutions such as future infrastructure planning and coordination with State of North Carolina agencies on the possible expansion of voluntary buyout zones.***
- 2) **Road Closure Concerns**: Various design alternatives were assessed for their potential flood reduction benefits and suitability within the neighborhood along Mollie's Branch. The design alternative that received the most votes from participating residents during previous public engagement events (held in April, August, and September of 2022) is also the plan that offered the greatest amount of flood reduction benefits in the community. This preferred scenario includes: (i) restoring the stream channel to better support floodplain function; (ii) adding an expanded area for floodplain storage and improvements to recreational amenities around the Central Middle School baseball fields; and (iii) modifying the road crossings at Washington Street (upgraded to a larger culvert), Williamson Street (conversion to a cul-de-sac), Burkhead Street (upgraded from a culvert to a bridge), and Lewis Street (conversion to a cul-de-sac).

In the existing condition, Williamson Street, Burkhead Street, and Lewis Street all overtop with floodwaters during commonplace rain events (e.g., “10-year flood”). In the proposed condition (with crossings at Williamson and Lewis Streets removed), Washington Street and Burkhead Street are both designed to withstand flood heights comparable to a “100-year flood” event. These conditions were used as the basis for grant applications that have been awarded for the project – significant deviation from this proposal risks the potential forfeiture of grant funds to build the improvements.

***The City recognizes that closing portions of roads can raise concerns. To ensure the removals provide minimal impact, the City: (i) will continue working with Central Middle School regarding any potential alterations to bus and carpool routes; (ii) is going to engage with transportation engineers to perform a Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) of the proposed conditions; and (iii) will assess the feasibility of adding additional sidewalks / pedestrian bridges at Williamson and Lewis Streets.***

- 3) **Communication**: The City has utilized a wide array of communication strategies (e.g., printed flyers, door hangers, social media, television, press releases) to ensure that information about the Mollie’s Branch project is dispersed community-wide, and especially to the parts of the community directly impacted by the project. However, it can be difficult to reach all stakeholders and interested community members, so ***the City has generated a website for the project so that community members can always stay updated and informed on the status of the project: <insert project URL>***

#### **WHAT TO EXPECT NEXT**

Within the next few months, the City will be reaching out to each property owner directly affected by the project in order to: (i) discuss the exact extent of needed easements within properties along Mollie’s Branch; (ii) outline allowable activities within the easement areas; and (iii) present a “deed of easement” for each property.

Thank you for your continued patience as the City works toward the implementation of this important project for our community.