

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Whiteville has been included in numerous federal disaster declarations in recent years (e.g., Hurricanes Matthew, Florence and Dorian). While each of these disaster events inflicted significant flood damages, areas of Whiteville within mapped floodplains continue to experience increased flood-related disruptions to public infrastructure and significant damages to private property during smaller, more frequent storm events.

The restoration of Mollie's Branch – a heavily modified stream channel that has been straightened and entrenched – is a foundational component of the Whiteville Community Floodprint Plan. The areas surrounding Mollie's Branch were identified as part of the Floodprint effort due to a prevalence of increased vulnerabilities, including: (i) a high concentration of buildings within the 100-year floodplain that are known to receive flood damages; (ii) multiple roadways that regularly overtop with floodwaters due to low elevation and/or undersized culverts; and (iii) socioeconomic factors that correlate with a historical lack of investment in resilience-building projects.

The proposed combination of "green" and "gray" infrastructure enhancements includes 5,100 linear feet of floodplain restoration, four roadway modifications (e.g., upgraded culverts) at locations where the stream passes underneath existing roads, and an expanded floodplain restoration area within the Central Middle School recreational complex.

Development of the Floodprint included geospatial analysis, concept-level hydraulic modeling, field-collected data, input from community stakeholders, and the development of multiple schematic designs in order to ultimately determine a single, preferred alternative for the project.

The following agencies and organizations are currently supporting the planning, design, and/or construction of the Mollie's Branch project: North Carolina Office of Recovery and Resiliency (NCORR), Golden LEAF Foundation (GLF), North Carolina Emergency Management (NCEM), and U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC).

TIMELINE:

+ January 2022: Following a City Council presentation, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is signed between City of Whiteville and NC State University Coastal Dynamics Design Lab (CDDL) to jointly work on the "Whiteville Floodprint" effort (funding provided by the North Carolina Office of Recovery and Resiliency (NCORR) at no cost to City).

+ April 2022: First public engagement event ("City-Scale Listening Session") is held at Vineland Depot. The restoration of Mollie's Branch is confirmed as a potential project in need of additional analysis and design.

+ August 2022: Second public engagement event ("Mollie's Branch Buyout Zone Expansion + Preliminary Scope Discussion") is held at the Columbus County Dream Center; 50% "Whiteville Floodprint" report is delivered to the City and NCORR.

+ September 2022: Third public engagement event ("Mollie's Branch Hydraulic Modeling + Design Alternatives") is held at the Columbus County Dream Center. A preferred design alternative is voted on by community members ("Scenario B"). A final schematic design ("Scenario C") is generated shortly following the September 2022 meeting, which is the same as "Scenario B" but with minor alterations to the proposed stream alignment and limits-of-work boundary based on public comment.

+ October 2022: City and CDDL submit Golden LEAF grant application for Design / Engineering services; CDDL project update provided via presentation to City Council.

+ January 2023: City and CDDL submit FEMA BRIC grant application for Design / Engineering and Construction services; CDDL project update provided via presentation to City Council.

+ February 2023: Golden LEAF grant award notification (\$249,880).

+ April 2023: 100% "Whiteville Floodprint" report is delivered to the City and NCORR; Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for Design / Engineering services is released.

+ May 2023: Summary of the 100% "Whiteville Floodprint" report presented to City Council and is unanimously adopted by City Council; team led by Gresham Smith / Biohabitats is approved by City Council as the preferred vendor to proceed with the scope of work as outlined in the RFQ.

+ July 2023: Fully executed contract is signed between the City and Gresham Smith / Biohabitats.

+ August 2023: FEMA BRIC grant award notification of selection (\$3,449,273); grant agreement to follow pending federal review of project scope (approx 12-month review period).

+ September 2023: Property owners adjacent to the stream are provided a project update and are notified of upcoming survey / field work to be performed by the Gresham Smith / Biohabitats team.

+ November 2023: Gresham Smith / Biohabitats delivers final survey of project area (required deliverable for "phase one" FEMA BRIC review).

+ January 2024: City and CDDL submit NCEM DRMF grant application for Construction services.

+ April 2024: Gresham Smith / Biohabitats delivers final hydraulic modeling report confirming previous CDDL modeling of flood reduction benefits for the preferred design alternative (required deliverable for "phase one" FEMA BRIC review); Gresham Smith / Biohabitats delivers

"Schematic Design" ("SD") phase site plans (30% set); 30% Design Review with Central Middle School staff.

+ May 2024: NCEM DRMF grant award notification (\$1,320,000); NCEM DRMF and Golden LEAF grants, together, satisfy local cost-share obligation of the FEMA BRIC proposal.

+ June 2024: Gresham Smith / Biohabitats delivers "Design Development" ("DD") phase site plans (60% set); provided site plans have undergone preliminary permitting review and establish anticipated limit-of-work boundaries.

+ August 2024: Fourth public engagement event ("Project Update + Easement Discussion") is held at the Columbus County Dream Center. Some attendees express unmet hazard mitigation needs in areas adjacent to the project site, and concern about potential impacts of roadway modifications connected to the project. City and CDDL agree to follow up with additional updates.

+ September 2024: City creates "Project Updates" page on City website, and provides press release / mailed flyers with updates in response to August 2024 meeting; **upcoming: City and CDDL finalize Grant Agreement with NCEM to initiate "phase one" of the FEMA BRIC award (i.e., team to deliver completed survey, updated hydraulic model report, 90% and 100% "Construction Documentation" sets, updated cost estimate, and updated benefit-cost analysis).**

+ October 2024 (upcoming): City and CDDL close out Golden LEAF grant.