REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

Recreation Master Plan

Town of Canton, North Carolina

Community Development Block Grant – Neighborhood Revitalization (CDBG-NR)

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Town of Canton | 85 Summer Street, P.O. Box 987 | Canton, NC 28716 | 828-648-2363

General Information

Schedule Summary

Milestone	Date
RFP Issued:	11/09/2026
Notification to Submit:	11/09/2026
Last Day for Questions:	12/09/2026 5:00 PM EST
Proposals Due:	12/09/2026 5:00 PM EST
Award / Contract Execution:	01/08/2027
Project Deadline:	12/31/2027

The schedule above has been established for the proposal and selection process. Every effort will be made to adhere to this schedule, but the Southwestern Commission, on behalf of the Town of Canton, reserves the right to adjust dates as circumstances require. Consultant selection will be decided by the Town of Canton staff and their representatives.

Point of Contact

This RFP is being administered by the Southwestern Commission Council of Governments on behalf of the Town of Canton. All information, questions, clarifications, and correspondence regarding this RFP shall be directed exclusively to the Southwestern Commission contact identified below.

Anne Wade
Senior Project Manager
Southwestern Commission Council of Governments
125 Bonnie Lane, Sylva, NC 28779
Phone: 828-586-1962
Email: anne@southwesterncommission.org

Questions

All questions must be submitted in writing via email to the Southwestern Commission contact identified above by the Last Day for Questions deadline noted in the Schedule Summary. Questions must include the subject line:

"CDBG Recreation Master Plan RFP Question – Town of Canton"

Interpretations or clarifications considered necessary in response to submitted questions will be issued in writing by the Southwestern Commission via email to all firms that have registered their interest to respond. Oral comments, statements, or instructions provided at any time by any party are without legal effect.

Addenda may be issued to clarify or modify RFP documents as deemed necessary. Firms shall acknowledge receipt of any addenda in the transmittal letter of their proposal.

Proposal Submission Deadline

Proposals must be submitted electronically as a single PDF document to the Southwestern Commission contact via email by the Proposals Due deadline noted in the Schedule Summary, with the subject line:

"CDBG Recreation Master Plan Proposal – Town of Canton"

The designated contact for each firm will receive an email confirmation of receipt. Late proposals, regardless of cause, will not be considered and will be automatically disqualified. It is the firm's sole responsibility to ensure timely submission.

Withdrawal of Proposals

A proposal may be withdrawn prior to the submission deadline, provided that a written withdrawal request is submitted to the Southwestern Commission contact by email before the deadline. Withdrawal does not prejudice the right to resubmit prior to the deadline.

Rejection of Proposals and Disclaimer

The Town of Canton reserves the right to reject any or all proposals received in response to this RFP, to cancel this RFP, or to terminate the selection process at any time if it determines such action is in the Town's best interest. This RFP does not commit the Town to award a contract or to reimburse any costs incurred in the preparation of proposals. The Town reserves the right to eliminate the need for the selected firm to complete one or more project tasks pending the outcome of related work or the availability of funding. All proposals become the property of the Town.

Award of Contract

Following evaluation and selection, the Southwestern Commission, on behalf of the Town, will notify the selected firm in writing that it is the preferred candidate. Upon notification, the selected firm will be asked to submit a definitive fee schedule for the project. The Town of Canton and the selected firm will then negotiate and execute a

Project Contract consistent with the terms of this RFP. If the Town and the selected firm do not reach agreement on contract terms, the Town reserves the right to terminate negotiations and proceed to the next ranked firm.

Before commencement of any work, the Town of Canton and the selected firm will enter into a contract stating all applicable terms, including the fee schedule and any applicable federal CDBG-NR requirements.

Role of the Southwestern Commission

The Southwestern Commission Council of Governments is serving as the procurement administrator for this RFP on behalf of the Town of Canton. The Southwestern Commission is the regional council of governments for the seven westernmost counties of North Carolina, including Haywood County, and provides planning, economic development, and grant administration support to member governments throughout the region.

While the Southwestern Commission is managing the RFP process and firm selection, the Town of Canton is the contracting party and client for all work performed under this project. The selected firm will work directly with Town of Canton staff, including the Planning Director, throughout the duration of the engagement.

1. Introduction

The Town of Canton is soliciting proposals from qualified planning firms to develop a comprehensive Recreation Master Plan. This plan is one of five coordinated planning efforts funded through a Community Development Block Grant – Neighborhood Revitalization (CDBG-NR) award and must be developed in alignment with the Town's Comprehensive Plan, Capital Improvement Plan, Stormwater Master Plan, and Pigeon River Corridor Plan. Firms responding to this RFP are encouraged to understand how this plan connects to and supports the broader planning ecosystem, and to bring that integrative perspective to their work.

The Recreation Master Plan will chart a course for Canton's parks, recreation facilities, greenways, and river access in a community undergoing profound transformation. It must honor the values of Canton's working families while helping the Town capture the economic opportunity presented by the Pigeon River corridor and the former paper mill site redevelopment. The plan must serve existing residents first while creating a recreational network that can attract investment, improve public health, and define Canton's next chapter.

2. Community & Project Background

Canton, North Carolina stands at a generational crossroads. For 115 years, the Champion/Pactiv Evergreen Paper Mill was the economic and social backbone of this community of approximately 4,500 residents providing more than 1,100 living-wage jobs and defining the identity of a proud blue-collar town. When the mill closure was announced in March 2023, Canton lost not only its largest employer but its economic engine, its tax base, and much of its sense of certainty about the future.

The loss was compounding. Hurricane Helene struck in September 2024, bringing a 1,000-year flood event to a community still reeling from the mill closure and from Tropical Storm Fred in 2021. Haywood County ranks first among all 100 North Carolina counties in flood-related property damage. Three FEMA-declared disasters in twenty years have tested the resilience of Canton's residents, infrastructure, and institutions.

The demographics underscore the urgency for strategic investment. Canton's median household income is $64,034, below state and national averages, with a poverty rate of approximately 11.8%. Though this is slightly lower than the North Carolina average, it still reflects substantial economic vulnerability, especially in the wake of the devastating loss of the region’s largest employer. The town continues to face challenges around job access, wage growth, and long-term economic mobility. Education levels in Canton mirror those of many small rural towns, with only around 15% holding a bachelor’s degree or higher. This gap points to the need for nontraditional educational opportunities, such as workforce training, green infrastructure certifications, and youth employment pipelines that provide upward mobility without requiring four-year degrees.

At the county scale, only 7% of Haywood County residents currently live within a 10-minute walk of a park. In Haywood County’s flood-impacted valleys, over 40% of residents live below 200% of the federal poverty level. Based on EPA's EJ-Screen mapping tool, 21 communities qualify as EPA/IRA disadvantaged communities. These are the residents this planning work must serve.

Within these compounding crises lies an unprecedented opportunity. The 185-acre former mill site sits adjacent to Canton's central business district, along the Pigeon River. New ownership by Two Banks Development LLC has brought fresh energy and ambitious ideas. A Community Development Block Grant (CDBG-NR) planning initiative is underway to comprehensively guide Canton's next chapter across five interconnected plans. The Town of Canton, through a Dogwood Health Trust Collaboration and Innovation grant, is working in partnership with Haywood Advancement Foundation, Haywood Waterways Association, and Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, to transform the Pigeon River corridor from a flood-vulnerable industrial site into a resilient, recreational and economic asset that enhances quality of life. The restoration and stewardship of the Pigeon River has the potential to be a catalyst for place-based economic development that supports residents, visitors, businesses, and the integration of historic downtown with new development that will occur on the mill site.

3. Project Objectives

The selected consultant will assist the Town in achieving the following objectives:

- Assess existing parks, recreation facilities, greenways, trails, and river access points
- Evaluate community recreation needs through robust public engagement, with emphasis on low- and moderate-income (LMI) residents, former mill workers and families, and flood-impacted households
- Integrate and build off community feedback from the Comprehensive Planning process slated to be finished in Fall 2026
- Identify gaps in access, equity, and outdoor infrastructure
- Develop a vision and priority framework for recreation investment that integrates with the Pigeon River Corridor Plan, mill site redevelopment, Chestnut Mountain Nature Park Master Plan, and floodway acquisitions that have potential for river access development and blueway/greenway alignment
- Connect recreation planning to economic development goals, including outdoor recreation economy opportunities along the Pigeon River
- Produce actionable, prioritized recommendations with realistic implementation strategies and funding pathways
- Align with state requirements for Recreation Plans that qualify projects for NC-Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) and other grant programs

4. Scope of Work

The process for creating the Recreation Master Plan must ensure that the final document reflects a clear vision for the Town’s Parks and Recreation Department as determined by citizens, developers, landowners, business leaders, public officials, and other key stakeholders through meaningful community participation. The consultant shall provide a full range of recreation planning services, including at minimum:

A. Project Initiation & Coordination

- Conduct kickoff meeting with Town staff and establish Steering Committee
- Develop detailed work plan, schedule, and communication protocols

- Coordinate regularly with Town staff, the Town's support team through the Dogwood Health Trust Collaboration & Innovation grant, and other CDBG planning consultants to ensure plan integration

B. Existing Conditions Assessment

- Inventory and map all parks, recreation facilities, greenways, trails, and river access points – existing & emerging
- Evaluate condition, accessibility, and equity of existing assets
- Align with ongoing Haywood County Project Development Planning initiative
- Review relevant existing plans and reports including Haywood County Destination Management Plan and Pigeon River Access Plan (2024), Haywood County Made By Mountains Building Outdoor Communities Report (2024), Haywood County Greenway Master Plan (2023), Chestnut Mountain Nature Park Master Plan (2020), and Canton Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (2019)
- Assess recreation assets relative to LMI populations and disadvantaged communities

C. Community Engagement

- Design and facilitate a meaningful, multi-phase public engagement process with emphasis on reaching LMI residents, former mill workers, flood-impacted households, and youth
- Coordinate engagement activities with other CDBG planning processes to reduce community fatigue
- Conduct surveys, focus groups, public workshops, and stakeholder interviews
- Ensure engagement is accessible including evening/weekend hours, multiple locations, and Spanish-language outreach as appropriate

D. Needs Assessment & Gap Analysis

- Analyze recreation needs relative to population demographics, income levels, and geographic distribution
- Identify underserved populations and areas with limited recreation access
- Evaluate opportunities presented by the Pigeon River corridor and former mill site

E. Vision, Goals & Recommendations

- Develop a community-informed vision and goals framework
- Produce prioritized recommendations for new facilities, improvements, greenways, river access, and programming
- Address affordability and equity across recommendations
- Connect recommendations to place-based economic development, public health, flood resilience, and quality of life goals

F. Implementation & Funding Strategy

- Develop phased implementation plan with cost estimates for priority projects
- Identify funding opportunities such as, PARTF, Recreational Trails Program, Land and Water Conservation Fund, NC Land and Water Fund, and provide guidance on how to align these sources for phased implementation
- Provide potential solutions and partnerships to support operations and maintenance of recreational asset investments in the long term

- Align capital recommendations with the Town's Capital Improvement Plan

5. Deliverables

- Draft Recreation Master Plan document for Town review and comment
- Final Recreation Master Plan in electronic form
- GIS data and maps of recreation assets
- Public engagement summary report
- Presentations to Planning Board and Town Board
- Funding opportunity matrix aligned with priority recommendations
- Strategies to address long-term operations and maintenance

The plan must be designed to satisfy NC-PARTF and similar grant eligibility requirements.

6. Proposal Requirements

Proposals shall be submitted as a single PDF and shall not exceed 30 pages, excluding transmittal letter, table of contents, covers, tabs, and appendix.

Proposals must include the following, in order:

A. Transmittal Letter (maximum 2 pages)

Signed by an officer authorized to enter into a contract with the Town. Must acknowledge receipt of any addenda.

B. Executive Summary

Firm's understanding of the project, Canton's context, regional context, and overall approach.

C. Firm Qualifications

- Firm overview: size, location, relevant resources
- Demonstrated experience preparing Recreation Master Plans for municipalities of similar size and context: work samples from the past 5 years (provide links or electronic format only)
- Experience working in post-industrial or disaster-recovery community contexts
- Team organization chart with key personnel, roles, and office locations
- Five professional references from similar projects. Include: name, organization, phone, and email

D. Project Approach

- Proposed methodology for each scope task
- Approach to community engagement, including strategies for reaching LMI and underserved populations
- Approach to integrating this plan with other CDBG planning efforts
- Approach to cost control and schedule management
- Preliminary project schedule

E. Cost Proposal

Itemized, not-to-exceed cost breakdown by task. Include any assumptions.

F. Appendix

- One-page resumes for up to 10 key personnel
- Project summaries for 3 completed Recreation Master Plans (past 5 years). Include total project cost, start/end dates, firm's role, and client reference contact
- Required certifications per Section 9

7. Evaluation Criteria

A Town of Canton selection committee will evaluate all proposals using the following weighted criteria:

#	Evaluation Criterion	Maximum Points
1	Team Qualifications: Firm experience preparing Recreation Master Plans; relevant expertise of key personnel; knowledge of Canton, Haywood County, and Western NC; quality of past work and references; experience in post-industrial or disaster-recovery contexts.	25
2	Technical Merit: Quality and completeness of proposed approach; soundness of methodology; understanding of Canton's specific context and the integrated CDBG planning initiative; approach to connecting recreation to economic development, public health, and flood resilience goals.	30
3	Community Engagement: Depth and creativity of proposed public engagement strategy; demonstrated ability to reach LMI and underserved populations; approach to reducing community fatigue across multiple planning processes.	20
4	Schedule & Cost: Feasibility of proposed schedule; cost reasonableness and transparency; demonstrated ability to deliver on time and on budget.	15
5	Funding Knowledge: Familiarity with PARTF, LWCF, and other recreation funding programs; ability to align plan recommendations with fundable project types.	10
	TOTAL	**100**

The Town may request interviews or presentations prior to final selection. Unsuccessful proposers will be notified promptly following award.

8. Federal Funding & CDBG-NR Compliance

This planning process is funded with Community Development Block Grant – Neighborhood Revitalization (CDBG-NR) funds administered by the North Carolina Department of Commerce. The selected consultant shall comply with all applicable federal, state, and local requirements, including:

- 24 CFR Part 570 (CDBG regulations)
- 2 CFR Part 200 (Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards)
- Applicable NC Department of Commerce CDBG-NR guidance and Bulletin 10-8
- SAM.gov registration — required prior to contract execution

This project is intended to benefit low- and moderate-income (LMI) persons in accordance with HUD's national objectives for the CDBG program.

Required Federal Contract Provisions (2 CFR Part 200, Appendix II)

The contract resulting from this RFP shall include the following provisions, as applicable:

- Remedies — provisions for administrative, contractual, or legal remedies for contractor violations
- Termination for Cause and Convenience
- Equal Employment Opportunity — Executive Order 11246 and 41 CFR Part 60
- Davis-Bacon Act (if applicable) prevailing wages for construction activities
- Copeland Anti-Kickback Act (if applicable)
- Contract Work Hours and Safety Standards Act (if applicable)
- Clean Air Act and Federal Water Pollution Control Act — contracts exceeding $150,000
- Debarment and Suspension — contractor must not appear on federal exclusion lists (SAM.gov)
- Byrd Anti-Lobbying Amendment — certification that no federal funds used for lobbying
- Access to Records — Town, State, and federal agencies shall have access to all records
- Record Retention — minimum five (5) years after project closeout, or longer if audit/litigation is pending
- Section 3 (if applicable) 24 CFR Part 75 requirements
- Procurement of Recovered Materials — applicable sustainability requirements
- Energy Efficiency — applicable energy standards

9. General Terms & Conditions

Conflict of Interest

No employee, officer, elected official, or agent of the Town who has a real or apparent conflict of interest shall participate in the selection, award, or administration of this contract, per N.C. General Statute 14-234. Per NC Commerce, a potential conflict of interest exists as defined in 24 CFR Part 570.489(h) and Bulletin 10-8 when a person involved in this CDBG project: (1) has family or business ties with any local government elected official or staff; (2) has requested or received a conflict of interest opinion; (3) has an ownership interest in an entity directly affected by proposed activities; or (4) derives any income or commission as a direct result of action taken by the local government board or its staff.

Historically Underutilized Businesses

The Town of Canton is committed to diversity in procurement and encourages participation by businesses owned by minorities, women, and persons with disabilities. Firms are encouraged to use HUB-certified vendors and subcontractors, as certified by the NC State Office of Historically Underutilized Businesses.

Ineligible Vendors

Per G.S. 147-86.59 and G.S. 147-86.82, companies identified as engaging in investment activities in Iran or engaged in a boycott of Israel are ineligible to contract with the Town. Any such contract shall be void ab initio.

Inadvertent Archaeological or Historical Discoveries

In the event any archaeological or historic materials are encountered during project activity, work in the immediate area must stop and the Town must be notified immediately. The contractor shall: (1) implement reasonable measures to protect the discovery site; (2) take steps to ensure confidentiality of the discovery site; and (3) restrict access to the site.

Insurance Requirements

During the term of the contract, the firm shall maintain at minimum: Commercial General Liability — $1,000,000 per occurrence / $2,000,000 aggregate; Business Automobile Liability — $1,000,000 per occurrence; Workers Compensation — statutory limits; Employer's Liability — $500,000 per accident / $500,000 per disease. The Town of Canton shall be named as an additional insured on the CGL policy.

Non-Discrimination

The firm shall comply with all federal and state requirements concerning fair employment and treatment of all employees without regard to any prohibited grounds as defined by federal and state law.

Confidentiality

Any Town information provided to the firm under this contract shall be kept confidential and used only for purposes required to perform the contract, without prior written approval by the Town of Canton.

Governing Law

This contract shall be governed by the laws of the State of North Carolina.

Payment Terms

Payment terms will be Net 30 days after receipt of a correct invoice or acceptance of deliverables, whichever is later, unless otherwise specified in the contract.

Force Majeure

Neither party shall be in default if prevented from performing due to events beyond reasonable control, including acts of war, natural disasters, or other catastrophic events.

Acknowledgement of Credit

As directed by the Town, the contractor shall include acknowledgement of funder(s) when using data or information developed under this agreement in posters, reports, publications, signs, presentations, or websites.

Certifications

In response to this RFP, firms shall certify: (a) authority to transact business in North Carolina (out-of-state firms); (b) no officer, director, or controlling owner convicted of securities violations in the last ten years; (c) compliance with North Carolina use tax requirements; (d) no gift or gratuity offered to any State or Federal employee; (e) E-Verify compliance for firms with more than 25 NC employees; (f) not identified on the NC State Treasurer's Final Divestment List for Iran investment activities.