

LAKES REGION PLANNING COMMISSION

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March 31, 2020

Rich Grogan, Executive Director
Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC)
James Cleveland Federal Building, Suite 1501
53 Pleasant Street
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

RE: NBRC Waiver Request – Laconia State School

Dear Mr. Grogan:

I am writing you today to request a waiver for the Laconia State School Redevelopment Project which currently does not meet NBRC eligibility criteria based on census estimates as it was just short of meeting the poverty criteria that would have maintained its eligibility. Barely a year ago in May of 2018, Gov. Chris Sununu nominated the Laconia census tract that covers this project area to be designated as an Opportunity Zone to encourage economic development and investment in low income areas.

Lakes Region Planning Commission (LRPC) is the federally designated local development district and the state designated regional planning commission providing a range of comprehensive planning and development services to 31 member communities and many economic development agencies. In addition to grant writing and administration, LRPC creates and maintains regional plans covering economic development, housing, telecommunications, transportation, and other man-made and natural regional resources. The LRPC has been specifically engaged by the Lakeshore Redevelopment Planning Commission (Lakeshore Commission) to assist the Commission in preparing and submitting this request for waiver as well as a NBRC grant application.

The City of Laconia is the largest and most important employment and service center community in the region. It serves as the county seat for multiple Belknap County services. The city not only has the largest population but also employs the greatest number of people. Laconia contributes to the economic stability of the region with broad and diverse groups of industries ranging from a cluster of advanced manufacturing to high concentrations of commercial and retail trade jobs.

Laconia is also a vitally important service center for the region. Many communities throughout the region depend on Laconia for access to shopping, centrally located nonprofit and government services, a hospital, an airport, a community college and much more. The Laconia economy clearly impacts all of Belknap county and the surrounding Carroll and Grafton counties with employment opportunities, transportation options, and public and nonprofit service delivery. Several communities that did meet the NBRC eligibility criteria (Belmont, Gilford, Gilmanton, Center Harbor and Tilton) currently benefit from Laconia's diversified services, and this project will play a significant regional role in adding to Laconia's larger regional impact.

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LRPC continues to be a strong proponent of redevelopment of the Laconia “State School” as one of our top regional development strategies contained in our Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs) for the region. Recent job estimates forecasted by Applied Economic Research (AER), indicate the former State School site in Laconia has the market-tested potential to create over 800 jobs. This underscores the regional value of moving this strategy forward.

The goal of redeveloping the State School property is also of state-wide importance. An act of the New Hampshire legislature (HB 340; Chapter 240, Laws of 2017) established the Lakeshore Redevelopment Planning Commission in 2017 with members appointed by the Governor and Executive Council, Speaker of the House, Senate President, and City of Laconia. The Lakeshore Commission has since acted aggressively to redevelop the site by coordinating and meeting with various state and local agencies and officials, conducting environmental assessments and feasibility studies, and holding numerous Commission meetings and several public information sessions, all leading to the development of a redevelopment master plan for the site. Also, since the State owns and operates this project site, there are significant costs associated with the upkeep of this property that would be offset by economic redevelopment efforts.

At its March 30th 2020 meeting, the Lakeshore Commission passed a resolution “to authorize LRPC in its capacity as the Lakeshore Commission’s consultant” to file a waiver request with the Northern Borders Regional Commission.

By this letter the LRPC on behalf of the Lakeshore Commission is requesting NBRC waive its prior eligibility determination and now deem the former Laconia State School property eligible for grant consideration in the 2020 grant year. Please find enclosed in support of this waiver request filed on behalf of the Lakeshore Commission the following:

1. Minutes from the March 30th 2020 Lakeshore Commission meeting; and
2. A report from Applied Economic Research that demonstrates significant positive regional economic impact on NBRC-eligible counties and communities as a result of the proposed former State School redevelopment project.

Thank you for considering this waiver request. If NBRC requires additional information to consider this waiver request, please let us know.

Sincerely,


Jeffrey Hayes
Executive Director