

Swiss Bear Downtown Development Corporation

PRESS RELEASE

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New Bern's Swiss Bear Awarded \$646,650 grant

Swiss Bear Downtown Development Corp. received an award of \$646,650, on behalf of the City of New Bern, to be used specifically in creation of needed public transient boating facilities. The proposal was submitted in September, 2008, on approval by the City Board of Aldermen, who permitted dedication of selected City-owned property as a required matching contribution, in lieu of cash investment. Funding for this US Fish & Wildlife Service program comes from federal excise taxes on boating and fishing supplies, and is to be used exclusively for the boating application.

New Bern's award will directly support Swiss Bear Downtown Development Corp's Connectivity Infrastructure Project, which is designed to commemorate New Bern's 300-year history on the Neuse and Trent Rivers, and to create lasting cultural and quality-of-life contributions to the community. Long-committed to downtown improvements, Swiss Bear is working closely with the City and various organizations to create a continuous River Walk, which will follow the Neuse River waterfront from the small Park at Queen and Front Streets, past the City's beautiful water views and historic sites, through the grounds of the History Education Center, now under construction, and around the riverfront behind the Tryon Palace. The Infrastructure Project connects with the River Walk on City Land at Eden and Front Streets, and extends it to the River History Marina.

The BIG grant addresss three specific parts of the Infrastructure Project. The first will help extend the River Walk via a pedestrian and bicycle bridge over Lawson Creek to and from the natural areas and recreational facilities of Lawson Creek Park. The bridge has been designed to accommodate Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements for pedestrians, as well as to permit easy passage by the boats moving to and from the Lawson Creek Park boat ramps on the creek. Vertical and horizontal clearances will match those of the Brices Creek Bridge, which supports deeper draft vessels than the shallow Lawson Creek. Part of the grant funds will link the new footbridge with the existing raised wetlands walk in the birding area of the park, and will improve that walk, which provides near total visual immersion in the wetlands environment, with lighting and educational signage on the various plants and animals therein.

The second project element is the clearance of navigational hazards from the old Barbour Boat Works basin, bounded by the railroad bridge, the Trent River, Jacks Island and the Birding Area, and the mouth of Lawson Creek. Earlier in the project, archeologists from ECU surveyed the bottom and identified a

number of possible hazards to be examined. Serious hazards will be removed as approved by appropriate North Carolina authority, while lesser hazards may be simply marked in accordance with established navigation practice. The basin bottom will not be significantly disturbed, and historic wrecks will be left alone, but marked if necessary.

The third element is the flagship of the Infrastructure Project. It is the River History Marina, to be located on Jacks Island, adjacent to a planned River History Park, which will feature large outdoor historical artifacts. The marina will be the first public marina in the New Bern area, and will serve short-term boating visitors with 14 35-foot floating slips. The facility will be managed from a dockmaster's office, to be constructed in the image of the historic Neuse River Lighthouse, whose skeletal remains can still be seen in the Neuse off Piney Point. The marina will subscribe to the environmental requirements of the NC Clean Marina Program, and will offer all traditional marina hospitality services, but will not sell fuel or permit boat maintenance on site. It is intended to complement existing area commercial marina facilities with its unique location and dedication of its small capacity to visits of ten days or less. The marina has been planned to generate enough revenue to maintain itself, to fund a replacement reserve, and to contribute substantially to other elements of the park complex. Approximately 20 part-time jobs will be created for the operation and management of the facility.

The City of New Bern dedicated public land and riparian rights to the project, to help justify the federal contribution, and will provide certain "in-kind" contributions, although no City cash will be required to construct the Infrastructure Project assets. The BIG grant will provide about 47% of the total project cost, with the remainder expected to be provided through various state and private foundation sources. Some private funds have already been awarded. Beside the educational, cultural and recreational benefits, this Infrastructure Project will bring approximately \$1.4 million in construction work to New Bern, some \$200,000 in annual gross marina and merchant income, and about 20 quality part-time jobs. Working in harmony with the other major tourism attractions in the city, the public marina will help contribute to the "critical mass" necessary to draw overnight family visitors to the city.

On April 8, 2009, U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announced the award of 14 Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG) grants in eleven states across the United States, totaling \$12.5 million. The North Carolina communities of Morehead City and Plymouth also won BIG grants to help with their planned construction of docks, slips, and other recreational and non-trailerable boating facilities.