



THE CHEF & THE FROG

605 S Madison St
Whiteville, NC 28472
(910) 640-5550

The Honorable Sean Duffy
Secretary, U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.
Washington, DC 20590

Whiteville, October 5, 2026

Re: Madison Street Bridge Expansion Project - Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation (PROTECT) Grant Application

Dear Secretary Duffy:

Vineland Hospitality Group, LLC, dba The Chef & The Frog, would like to express the strong support of for the North Carolina Department of Transportation's Madison Street Bridge Expansion project in the City of Whiteville, Columbus County, North Carolina. The project will improve the Madison Street (US 701 Business) crossing over Soules Swamp by extending the existing bridge and adding a second bridge. These improvements will help the roadway to better handle heavy rainfall and flooding events, keeping this important connection open for residents, businesses, emergency responders and travelers.

Flooding is a recurring issue along Madison Street and throughout downtown Whiteville during heavy rainfall events. Improving the bridge crossing would reduce flooding in the area and allow rainwater to recede more quickly after heavy rainfall events. As a result, the project would help reduce road closures, improve access to downtown Whiteville, and provide more reliable travel for all roadway users during and after heavy rainfall events.

Specifically, for **The Chef & The Frog**, the importance of the Madison Street Bridge Expansion project can be summarized by the following:

- **US 701 Business/Madison Street is a critical artery for our business and for the local economy.** Most of our customers are from outside the immediate area and rely on this route to reach us. It is also the primary access used by many of our suppliers. Every time flooding closes or restricts the road, customers are unable to reach us and deliveries are delayed or disrupted. The resulting loss of business, spoiled or delayed goods, and uncertainty place a real financial burden on a small business like ours.
- **Flooding has become such a routine threat that we have permanent sandbags positioned at our doors.** They are an unfortunate but necessary part of operating a business here—a constant

reminder that another storm can threaten our ability to open, serve our customers, and protect our property. After years of repeated flooding, we should not have to consider this normal.

- **This project would provide more than physical flood mitigation; it would provide a sense of security and hope for the future.** Knowing that meaningful steps are being taken to address a problem that has repeatedly threatened our businesses and our community would allow us to invest and plan with greater confidence, rather than wondering each time a major storm approaches whether we will be able to recover once again.
- **Our restaurant has become an important part of the fabric of Columbus County.** We employ 12 people and have built a business that serves not only as a restaurant, but as a gathering place for the community. We host many of the county's important celebrations and life events, including rehearsal dinners, bridal and baby showers, birthday and retirement parties, funeral gatherings, and other community events. Protecting the infrastructure that allows businesses like ours to survive is ultimately about protecting the economic and social vitality of the community we serve.
- **The financial toll of each flood is becoming increasingly difficult for us to sustain.** With every major flooding event, we face significant losses, followed by the often exhausting process of dealing with insurance companies that look for ways to limit or avoid paying for the damage and business interruption we have experienced. After 17 years in this location, we have invested an enormous amount of time, money, and effort into building our restaurant and becoming part of this community. But each flood takes another piece of that investment away. We have always managed to rebuild and keep going, but the losses are becoming so substantial that we honestly do not know how many more times we can do it. We are resilient, but resilience has its limits. Without meaningful flood mitigation, we worry that one day the next flood could simply be the one from which we cannot recover.

The Madison Street Bridge Expansion project represents a strategic investment in transportation resilience, mobility, public safety, and long-term vitality of downtown Whiteville and Columbus County as a region. I respectfully urge your full consideration and support for funding that will allow North Carolina DOT to advance and complete this important project, providing lasting benefits to the City of Whiteville, Columbus County, and southeastern North Carolina.

Thank you for your consideration of this meritorious grant and your commitment to our nation's critical transportation system.

Sincerely,

Annie Slama

The Chef & The Frog

605 S Madison St, Whiteville, NC 28472

www.ChefNC.com

910-640-5550 x2