

Policy Briefing Summary

City Council



Regarding:	Resolution Endorsing West Main and Ridge SMARTSCALE Application
Staff Contact(s):	Zoe Macomber, Transit Planner, Brennen Duncan, City Engineer
Presenter:	Brennen Duncan, City Engineer
Date of Proposed Action:	June 15, 2026

Issue

City Council approval is requested to submit an Application for Round 7 [\[ZM1\]](#) of SMARTSCALE infrastructure funds.

Background / Rule

The Virginia Department of Transportation's ("VDOT") Strategically Targeted and Affordable Roadway Solutions ("STARS") Program was established to develop comprehensive innovative transportation solutions designed to relieve congestion bottlenecks and solve critical safety challenges. The planning process involves planners, traffic engineers, safety engineers, roadway designers, and local stakeholders in a data-driven approach. Recommendations derived from STARS studies represent solutions that can be programmed into the Commonwealth Six-Year Improvement Program ("SYIP") to receive funding for implementation.

Desired project locations are selected through a combination of state and local priorities. The West Main/Ridge Street intersection was selected due to priority needs including:

- VDOT Culpepper District recommended location as identified in the Statewide Transportation Plan, VTrans, including Construction District Priority 1 and 2 needs.
- VDOT's STARS Study Corridor Identification Dashboard identification of:
 - 2019-2024 crash propensity
 - Potential Safety Improvements (PSI) segment along the W Main St approach
- Traffic volumes and congestion
- Bike and pedestrian network connectivity

The Study's intent was to support the VDOT Culpepper District with analysis of operations at the intersection of Ridge Street and West Main Street (BUS US-250)/West Water Street in the City. West Main Street (BUS US-250) is identified as a Potential for Safety Improvement ("PSI") segment and was previously a SMARTSCALE project that was subsequently cancelled due to funding constraints. The objectives of this Study were to address several Virginia Transportation Plan ("VTrans") needs, such as bicycle, pedestrian, and transit/transportation demand management ("TDM") access needs, congestion mitigation, and improved safety at the Ridge Street and West Main Street (BUS US-250)/West Water Street intersection. Twenty-two percent (22%) of the reported crashes during the period 2019-2024 at this location involved pedestrians. The purpose of this Study was to evaluate operational, multi-modal, and safety conditions and to develop improvement alternatives that will address these issues and the regional transportation needs. The advanced alternative recommended by the Study was developed with identification of accessibility, congestion, and safety improvements along the corridor for all transportation users.

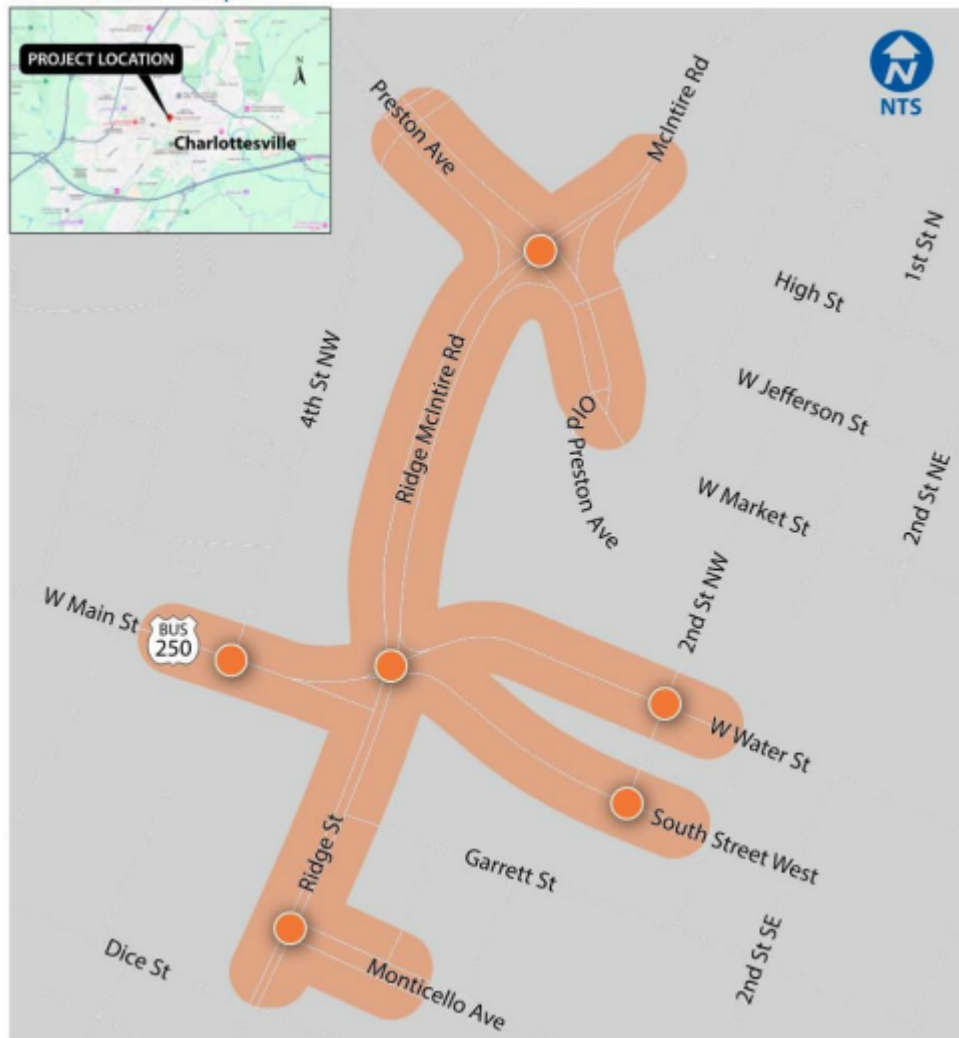
In 2025, VDOT began work on this STARS Study at the intersection of West Main Street and Ridge Street. This project was aimed at moving the existing statue plinth to a safer location for vehicle, bike, and pedestrian movements through the intersection, improving safety and access for all users. VDOT held public engagement on its recommended design concept in January 2026. Additional project background and preliminary alternatives were presented to City Council in March 2026, and a review of public engagement throughout the design process is included in Memo attachments.

In 2014, the Virginia General Assembly enacted legislation to create new criteria for the allocation of transportation funding. SMARTSCALE funding is available to localities through two (2)-year application cycles. Approved projects are programmed in the SYIP, and funding is allocated to localities six (6) years later. Eligible projects address: (1) need on Corridors of Statewide Significance; (2) capacity need on regional networks; (3) improvements to support Urban Development Areas; and/or (4) improvements to address a VTrans specified safety need. The SMARTSCALE Program is administered by the Office of Intermodal Planning and Investment ("OIPI"). OIPI partners with VDOT and the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation ("DRPT") throughout the Application process. OIPI, VDOT, and DRPT review project Applications for eligibility screening, readiness screening, and project scoring. Once projects are scored by Staff, the Commonwealth Transportation Board makes the final determination for project programming.

Submitting the proposed alternative for the West Main/Ridge Intersection as the City's 2026 SMARTSCALE Application, due in August, will put the Project in consideration for state funding and inclusion in the Commonwealth's Six (6)-Year Improvement Program. A Resolution of Support from City Council is required to finalize the Project Application.

Analysis

The Study Area is centered on the intersection of Ridge Street, West Main Street (BUS US-250E), and West Water Street in Charlottesville, Virginia. This key intersection accommodates a diverse mix of local and regional traffic, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users. West Main Street (BUS US-250E) serves as a vital east-west corridor, linking the University of Virginia with downtown Charlottesville. Ridge Street/Ridge McIntire Road functions as a crucial north-south route, connecting residential neighborhoods with commercial hubs, while West Water Street and South Street West carrying lower traffic volumes, play an essential role in facilitating local access and business activity.



The Study Area includes the following intersections:

- Ridge Street at West Main Street/West Water Street (Signalized)
- West Main Street (BUS US -250E) at 4th Street NW (Signalized)
- Ridge Street at Monticello Avenue (Signalized)
- Ridge McIntire Road (BUS US-250E) at Preston Avenue (Signalized)
- South Street West at 2nd Street NW (Unsignalized)
- West Water Street at 2nd Street NW (Unsignalized)
- Ridge Street/5th Street SW at Cherry Avenue/ Elliot Avenue (Signalized)

After collecting existing conditions with the Study Work Group, consultant support, and Public Input Survey #1, Study consultants worked with VDOT and City Staff to develop three (3) alternatives for review. The three (3) preliminary alternatives presented at the first Community Input Meeting on August 14, 2025, are as follows:

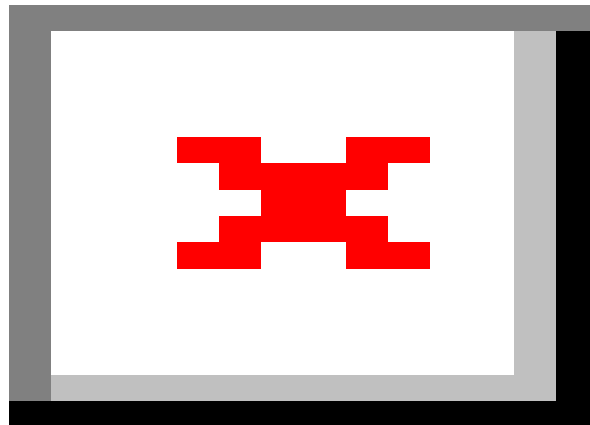
-Alternative 1: Converts West Water Street and South Street W to one (1)-way streets, shortens crossings, creates a pedestrian plaza, incorporates bike lanes, and adds street parking.

-Alternative 2: Converts West Water Street and South Street W to one (1)-way streets, creates a pedestrian plaza, includes a dedicated pedestrian and bike signal phase, and incorporates bike lanes, and adds street parking.

-Alternative 3: Replaces the intersection with a roundabout, converts West Water Street and South Street W to one (1)-way streets, incorporates bike lanes and shared use paths, and adds street parking.

Feedback from Public Survey #2 ranked Alternative 2 highest, with overall feedback focused on prioritizing safety for pedestrians and bicycles with the proposed sidewalks, shared use paths, and bike lanes. Survey respondents also emphasized proper signage and markings to ensure drivers can easily understand and adjust to the new configuration of one (1)-way streets.

The Preferred Alternative Concept was developed from Preliminary Alternative 2 and refined to better address operational performance and multimodal connectivity within the study area. In addition, the concept incorporates the continuation of the bikeway along W Water Street, enhancing connectivity and providing a more consistent and accessible facility for cyclists. These refinements reflect a balanced approach that responds to not only operational needs but also community priorities, project goals, and feasibility considerations.



In the second Community Input Meeting, on January 22, 2026, based on sentiment analysis of comments, the feedback was 49% positive, 37% negative, and 13.5% mixed/neutral (among 67 respondents). Key themes included pedestrian and bike safety, driver behavior, multimodal access, and environmental and aesthetic considerations. Many comments supported improved safety, reduced congestion, and better connectivity of the preferred design. The City and VDOT co-hosted an additional public focus group session on April 27, 2026, to better engage downtown residents and the local business community.

On April 27, 2026, a Charlottesville Downtown Engagement session was held to provide the final opportunity for public review of the recommended concept before the City moves to

funding application. Key themes were accommodation of delivery vehicles serving downtown businesses, questions about siting the bi-directional bikeway on the south side of Water St, and public & tourist wayfinding to the Pedestrian Mall if Water St is made one-way.

After technical review, the final concept preserves key aspects of the preferred alternative, including a bi-directional bikeway on the south side of one-way Water St, so that the project maintains competitive advantage in the SMART SCALE application scoring process. For example, shifting the bi-directional bikeway to the north side of Water St would require a larger curb return radius at the northeast quadrant to accommodate heavy vehicle turning movements. Expanding the radius would push the Ridge McIntire Road crosswalk farther upstream and away from the signalized intersection, increasing pedestrian crossing distance and reducing the overall effectiveness of the pedestrian crossing location.

The proposed design improves multi-modal safety, improves traffic flow (versus the 2050 No-Build scenario), and enhances accessibility and connectivity. In response to community comments raised, City members of the STARS working group will refer concerns and recommendations outside of scope for the STARS study and SMART SCALE funded project to the appropriate City departments.

Financial Impact

At this time, there is no financial impact to the City. The Application includes no local match and would be secured by federal and state funds. If the Project is selected, the City would be responsible for Project administration. Administration of the project would be handled by our Capital Projects Division funded through the operating budget for the Department of Public Works.

Recommendation

City Staff recommends that City Council approve the attached Resolution of Support for SMARTSCALE Application 2026, based on the STARS Study of the Ridge Street and West Main Street Intersection.

Recommended Motion (if Applicable)

"I make a Motion that City Council approve the attached Resolution of Support for SMARTSCALE Application 2026, based on the STARS Study of the Ridge Street and West Main Street Intersection."

Attachments

1. STARS-Ridge-St-W-Main-St-Intersection-Improvement Final Report
2. STARS Ridge St - Public Engagement Summary
3. STARS Ridge Street Exhibit
4. SMART SCALE CA-MPO R7 Resolution - Locality Projects
5. W Main_Ridge VDOT Update March 16, 2026
6. Resolution of Support for SMART SCALE 2026 (1)jvhedits