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FABRICATORS TO REVIEW BUNCOMBE COUNTY FAILING WAYFINDING SIGNS

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (August 24, 2010) — Three sign fabricating companies will be in Asheville on Friday, Aug. 27 to examine the failing wayfinding signs and meet with members of the Partnership on Wayfinding team and members of the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority (BCTDA).

The companies have been invited to discuss their respective responses to a request for proposal issued by BCTDA August 6 seeking vendors to repair the peeling signs and the remaining vehicular and parking signs which are at future risk for failure. An exception to the public bidding statute for any necessary repair work during the progress of a public construction project enabled BCTDA to issue the RFP.

Each of the three companies have presented options that are within the remaining \$200,000 that was part of the original amount allocated for the project but was not paid to the original vendor, L & H Signs, Inc. in Reading, PA, since the job was not properly completed. The finalists are: Signs, Etc. based in Charlotte, Geograph in Harrison, OH and Architectural Sign in Norcross, GA.

The wayfinding project was the culmination of more than three years of community input and public meetings to address design and implementation of the project. BCTDA granted \$1.5 million dollars for the project from the Tourism Product Development Fund which comes from the one percent lodging tax paid by overnight visitors staying in lodging accommodations in Buncombe County. Another \$150,000 was dedicated for maintenance and attic stock for a five year period.

The entire project encompasses 330 elements, including vehicular and pedestrian signage, parking banners and garage entrance/exit signs, gateway and district identification signs and monuments and kiosks located throughout Buncombe County. Local artisans designed the finials for the poles and many of the signs feature the literary works of notable North Carolina authors.

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The project went through a state public bidding process that required granting the project to the lowest responsible bidder. As required by law, the project was well advertised. No Asheville or Western North Carolina firms bid on the original project. As installation of the signage system neared completion, several of the vehicular signs started peeling, forcing BCTDA to take necessary steps required in the contract in order to begin a process to address the problem. Upon consultation with its attorney, BCTDA issued the request for proposals August 6. Seven firms responded to the RFP. Only one local firm submitted a proposal and it was in conjunction with a fabricator in South Carolina.

Removal of the vinyl on some of the signs began August 10, after BCTDA complied with certain provisions of its contract with L&H. By proceeding in this manner, BCTDA sought to avoid any accusation that it was somehow responsible for not abiding by the terms of the contract.

BCTDA understands that each of the companies proposes to do testing to determine the cause of the sign failure should it be awarded the repair contract.

Following the interviews and discussion with the companies, a recommendation will be made to the entire BCTDA board. Although the proposals vary, they all indicate that replacement of the priority signs – those that show the worst signs of peeling – will be complete in October.

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