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RIVERLINK RENAMES PROJECT THE CENTRAL ASHEVILLE WATERSHED RESTORATION PLAN

Asheville, NC- June 24, 2020- In August 2019, RiverLink began a project to investigate and find solutions to water quality issues in three Asheville streams. The name River Arts District Watershed Restoration Plan was initially chosen because the major streams —Bacoate Branch and Town (Nasty) Branch—are most visible to the public in the River Arts District where they flow into the French Broad River. This particular watershed, however, is made up of many unique neighborhoods and includes the historic African American East End/Valley Street and Southside communities.

Over the course of this year-long project, RiverLink has met with neighborhood groups to raise awareness of the watershed restoration plan and listen to community members' concerns about the watershed in which they live.

When we spoke with Black residents, many expressed mistrust and concern about the River Arts District Watershed Restoration Plan. Black residents expressed fear that this rapidly developing part of Asheville would expand into their neighborhoods and hasten the gentrification that is already occurring there. We heard stories about the painful history of urban renewal in the Southside community, how homes were destroyed in the name of progress. These conversations led us to reflect on the name of the watershed, and ultimately decide to change the project name.

In an effort to be more inclusive of *all* community members in the watershed, RiverLink is changing the project name to the Central Asheville Watershed Restoration Plan. As an environmental organization, we are also committed to ensuring that our efforts to address water quality issues also benefit the historically marginalized communities of the watershed. We pledge to keep the conversation going and listen to residents' concerns about any projects or initiatives that we propose to improve the ecological health of the watershed.