

Welcome Signage Honoring George Moses Horton: Update and Request for Board Direction

July 27th, 2026 - Chatham County Board of Commissioners



Introduction

- On June 16, 2025, the Board of Commissioners adopted a resolution requesting that the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) erect signs on US 15-501 at the Orange County and Lee County lines to honor George Moses Horton.
- Prior to the resolution's adoption, staff worked with NCDOT to identify an appropriate signage option.
- The approach presented to the Board in coordination with NCDOT at the time included:
 - A standard "Welcome To" sign; and
 - A supplemental sign honoring George Moses Horton.
- Following the Board of Commissioners June 16, 2025 meeting, staff began working with NCDOT to move the project forward.



Update – Change in NCDOT Requirements

- In July 2025, NCDOT notified staff that, following discussions with its sign manufacturer, the proposed supplemental sign could not be produced under the federal 2023 Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD).
- The manual prohibits:
 - Names,
 - Promotional messages,
 - Notable accomplishments, or
 - Claims from being displayed on jurisdictional boundary signs or supplemental plaques.
- As a result, NCDOT could install only a standard welcome sign without supplemental signage honoring George Moses Horton.
- During August and September 2025, staff worked with NCDOT to identify an alternative, but no suitable option was available through NCDOT's standard sign manufacturing program that includes honoring George Moses Horton as per the Board's adopted resolution.



Alternative Option: Gateway Signs

- Following notification that the original sign concept could not move forward, staff began researching other ways to accomplish the intent of the Board's resolution.
- In November 2025, staff began evaluating the possibility of gateway signage under NCDOT's Standard Practice for Gateway Signs.
- Based on this work, gateway signage appears to be the main option for signs that specifically honor the intent of the George Moses Horton sign resolution.
- Since that time, staff have been working with procurement to explore options for the signage, and have engaged firms and peer local governments to identify paths forward while complying with rules set forth in NCDOT guidelines.
- **To Note:** Gateway signs are locally initiated and funded and provide greater flexibility in design and messaging than standard NCDOT jurisdictional boundary signs.
 - The more elaborate the sign the more expensive.



Alternative Option: Gateway Signs – 2

If the Board directs staff to move forward with the gateway-sign option, the project would proceed in two phases:

Phase 1: Design and NCDOT Coordination

- Staff would engage a qualified firm to:
 - Develop preliminary sign concepts and evaluate potential locations
 - Coordinate with NCDOT regarding applicable gateway-sign requirements;
 - Complete traffic-safety analysis or other technical work, if required by NCDOT;
 - This phase is expected to cost less than \$15,000.

Phase 2: Fabrication, Installation, and Maintenance

- Following completion of the design and coordination work, staff would return to the Board with finalized designs, locations, and estimated costs and receive direction on whether to move forward;
 - The cost of this project phase is dependent on the design and type of sign the Board decides to move forward with.
 - Prospective costs based on NCDOT welcome sign estimates (may be more or less):
 - \$8,100 for Chatham/Orange County Sign and \$7,000 for Lee/Orange County Sign
- If so, fabrication and installation would be procured separately through the County's typical procurement process.
- **To note:** Once installed, the County would be responsible for ongoing maintenance of the signs.



Alternative Option: Gateway Signs - 3

- If the Board is interested in moving forward with gateway signage, staff is requesting direction to proceed with Phase 1: Design and NCDOT Coordination.
- To move forward, the Board would be asked to:
 - Adopt the project-specific resolution exempting the professional-services contract from the Mini-Brooks Act and applicable Chatham County procurement policies for the expedience of the project; **and**
 - Authorize the County Manager to negotiate and execute a contract for design and NCDOT coordination services, subject to legal review.
- This Mini-Brooks Act exemption would apply only to the design and coordination phase.
- Staff and the selected consultant would return to the Board with proposed designs, locations, and estimated costs before proceeding with fabrication and installation.



Questions or Direction?



Motion

- If the Board is interested in moving forward with gateway signage, staff would request:

Motion to approve the resolution exempting professional services for the Welcome Signs Honoring George Moses Horton Project from the Mini-Brooks Act and applicable Chatham County procurement policies, and to authorize the County Manager to negotiate and execute a contract for design and coordination services related to the project.

