

PRE-FEASIBILITY BRIEFING

Downtown Convention Center

Seven findings from public records and a May 2026
conversation with CSL International

City Council Work Session · 2026



01

Foundation

The 2021 CSL study: what transfers, what does not

02

Market

The 2024 REVPAR hotel market study

03

Demand

State association conference rotations

04

Playbook

The ten largest cities in North Carolina

05

Safeguards

Process safeguards for a future RFP

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Action

Phases between authorization and opening

07

Investment

Cost, scope, and timeline stated by CSL

THEN

Options · Summary · Questions

Three structures Council could authorize;
no action requested tonight.

Compiled in response to Mayor Colvin's May 4, 2026 Agenda Item Request, "Feasibility Study for Downtown Convention Center."

Key Numbers at a Glance

\$100K

STATED STUDY COST

CSL verbal estimate, May 2026

3–4 mo

STATED TIMELINE

Per CSL conversation

1.1M

CATCHMENT

Within a 60-minute drive

\$280M+

ESTIMATED PROJECT

Convention center plus hotel

5–7 yrs

BUILD HORIZON

Per CSL guidance

SOURCES

The 2021 Cumberland County feasibility study (CSL International) · the 2024 REVPAR International hotel market study · the Cumberland County Board of Commissioners' record, 2020–2025 · a May 2026 conversation with CSL International · public reporting on the ten largest cities in North Carolina.

This briefing states what is documented. It is not a feasibility study or a recommendation. The accompanying CAM states the options available to Council and staff's recommended next step.

What the 2021 CSL Study Established

Cumberland County's 2021 feasibility study evaluated a 2,500-seat performing arts hall, not a convention center. Market findings transfer; program findings do not.

TRANSFERS • INDEPENDENT OF FACILITY TYPE

1.1M

residents within a 60-minute drive; Cumberland County itself is 336K

80%

of community leaders preferred downtown; public forums agreed, 48% vs. 23% for the Crown Complex

\$80.6M

bondable capacity from the existing 1% F&B tax (\$7.4M per year)

#1

downtown scored 161 on the 20-criteria site framework vs. Crown 135, Outer Loop 107

DOES NOT TRANSFER • TIED TO THE 2,500-SEAT HALL

COST

\$77.5M for an 89,000 sf hall vs. a \$280–400M range for a center plus 250-key headquarters hotel

DEMAND

148 entertainment events per year vs. 50–80 multi-day conventions with different operating economics

HOTEL

No hotel in the 2021 plan; a convention center study must model hotel and center in tandem

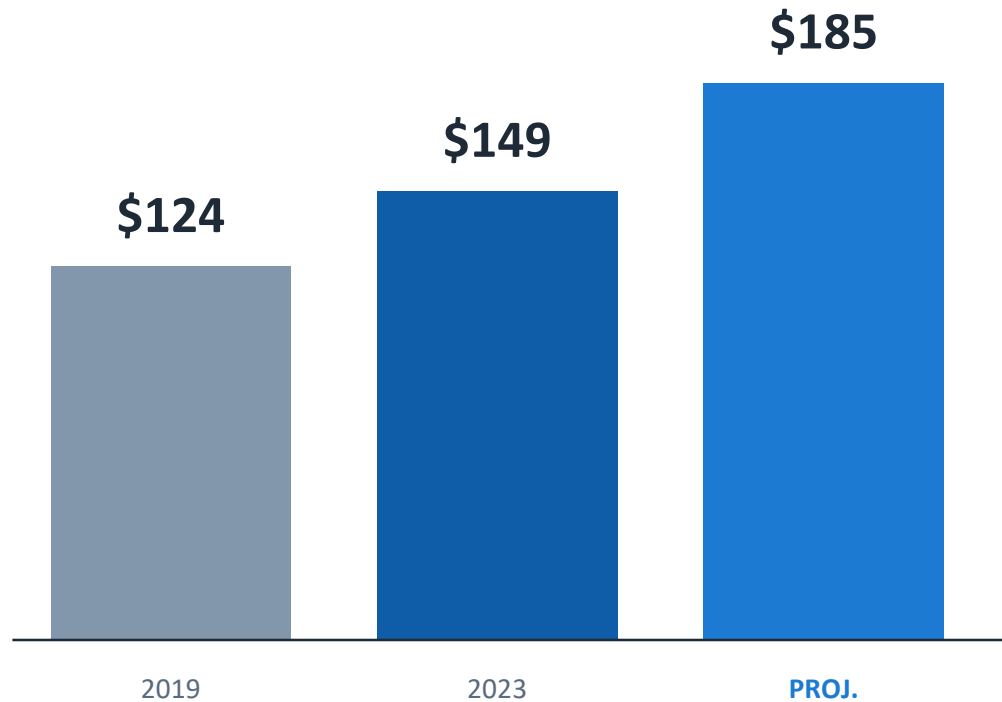
SITE

2021 compared three areas of the county; a center study requires specific parcels

The 2024 Hotel Study: Profitable, at Boutique Scale

REVPAR International letter report to the City Manager, March 2024. A 125-key upscale soft-branded hotel downtown clears the market with no municipal incentives.

AVERAGE DAILY RATE · DOWNTOWN COMP SET



Comp set: six hotels, 76.3% occupancy in 2023 · RevPAR +5.0%/yr since 2019 · 60% of demand is corporate-government (Fort Liberty)

73%

stabilized occupancy

\$2.0M

EBITDA after reserve

125-key

boutique hotel

\$0

municipal subsidy

Not yet modeled: a convention center needs a 250–300 key full-service headquarters hotel. Those economics differ from the 125-key boutique tier and were outside this study's scope.

Where NC Associations Convene: Not Here

ASSOCIATION	2024	2025	FAY?
NC League of Municipalities	Winston-Salem	Greenville NC	×
NC Assoc. of County Commissioners	Winston-Salem	Greenville NC	×
NC Bar Association	Charlotte	Asheville	×
NC REALTORS	Wilmington	Cherokee	×
82nd Airborne Division Assoc. (HQ: Fayetteville)	Orlando, FL	Orlando, FL	×

0

major NC association conferences on a recent Fayetteville rotation, per this preliminary scan

1/2

Greenville NC's population vs. Fayetteville. It opened a center and hosts the two largest.

The Ten Largest NC Cities

■ Operates
■ Advancing
■ None
■ Special case

1	Charlotte 903,844		Charlotte Convention Center · 600K sf
2	Raleigh 481,031		Raleigh Convention Center · expanding to 798K sf
3	Greensboro 301,198		Koury Center + Coliseum · 417K sf
4	Durham 291,467		Advancing · \$540M, opens 2031–32
5	Winston-Salem 252,037		Benton Convention Center · 150K sf
6	Fayetteville 210,815		None · no active project
7	Cary 179,306		Part of Raleigh meeting district
8	Wilmington 120,805		Wilmington Convention Center · 107K sf
9	High Point 116,245		Furniture market substitute
10	Concord 108,719		Hotel-attached center · 42K + 140K sf

Fayetteville is the only top-ten city over 200,000 with neither an existing downtown convention center nor an active project to build one.

Process Safeguards for a Future RFP

How comparable public facility projects are structured points to three safeguards any future RFP could include from day one.

1

Automatic re-validation triggers

Every contract pauses for public re-validation if the program or budget moves beyond a defined threshold (e.g., 10%).

Keeps scope and cost aligned with what was publicly approved.

2

Program and site approved together

Council and stakeholders sign off on the program and the site before any project-management contract is executed.

Sequences major commitments after the fundamentals are set.

3

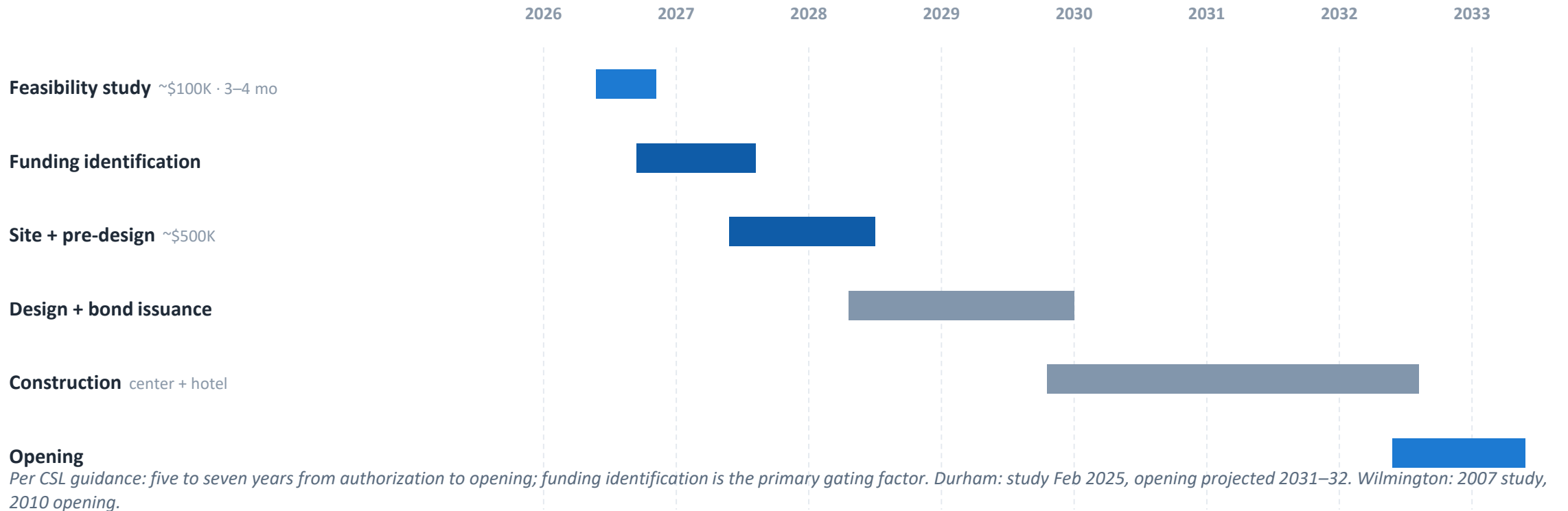
Parcel-level evaluation, re-confirmed

Each candidate site carries its own program and pro forma, with a second public confirmation at 100% design.

Keeps the demand analysis attached to the actual site and design.

Identified through staff's review of how recent public facility projects in the region and peer cities were structured. [Detail in Section 05 of the briefing book.](#)

Five to Seven Years, Beginning with a Study



1

Council resolution + appropriation
(\$100K–\$200K NTE)

2

Stakeholder steering committee
scopes the RFP

3

RFP incorporates the Crown record's
lessons

4

Governance vehicle + NCGA
engagement + parallel research

What CSL Stated the Study Would Cost

\$100K

Stated cost for the feasibility study · CSL International, May 2026

3–4 mo

to deliver from contract execution

2–3

candidate sites identified, with loose massing

\$500K

stated Phase II: blueprints, architecture, pre-design

SCOPE STATED BY CSL

- Market capacity and saturation analysis
- Demand modeling, frequency, and trends
- Building program and operating pro forma
- Two to three candidate sites with loose massing
- 30-year economic impact projection

Carried forward: CSL already holds the 2021 catchment, demographic, and F&B tax modeling.

Provided verbally; no written quote has been issued. Final pricing for any path would be set by a formal RFP. Funding source is a separate Council decision addressed in the accompanying CAM.

Three Structures Council Could Authorize

OPTION 1

Feasibility only

\$100K

3–4 MONTHS

Market, program, operating pro forma, and 2–3 candidate sites with loose massing.

Council keeps the decision on whether to proceed.

OPTION 2

Full pre-design path

\$600K

3–4 MO + 6–9 MO

Everything in Option 1, plus blueprints, a parcel-level site pick, and a cost estimate from actual program.

Council commits to both phases at the outset.

BUILT-IN CHECKPOINT

OPTION 3

Phase-gated

\$100K + gate

NTE \$600K ON COUNCIL VOTE

Phase I now; Phase II is authorized only if Council so directs at Phase I delivery.

Smallest upfront commitment, with the Phase II decision retained.

Funding source is a separate Council decision addressed in the accompanying CAM.

The Findings, and the Options

01

Seven findings, drawn from public records and a May 2026 conversation with CSL International, are summarized in this briefing and the accompanying briefing book.

02

Three structures are available should Council wish to proceed: \$100K, \$600K, or a phase-gated path.

03

This briefing is informational. No decision or action is requested tonight.



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