

## **Pioneer Park: Tourism and Warming Center Upgrades**

County Funding Request: \$150,000 (Anticipated \$150,000 City Match). ARPA Nexus: Tourism, Distressed Areas (Downtown Ferndale)

**Request:** Provide a total of \$300,000 (50% County, 50% City) to restore the exteriors of the Pioneer Village cabins, replace the existing stage, construct entry improvements, establish COVID barriers, provide funding for improved artifact collection, retention, and displays, and establish a one-time funding source for additional tourism outreach. Includes improvements to the Pioneer Pavilion to establish an all-weather heating and cooling station by installing air conditioning, and other equipment. These improvements will serve to develop the Pavilion as a true community center that may be used during significant weather events while also providing opportunities for community events, classrooms, and more.

**Issue:** As the tourism industry recovers, tourism patterns and expectations have changed, with an anticipated increased interest in local or regional tourism, day trips, and similar attractions. Ferndale is well-positioned geographically to take advantage of these trends, as there are nearly seven million people within a two-hour drive of the city.

The Pioneer cabins have been preserved and protected by volunteers for over a century. This maintenance has not kept up with the deterioration of the cabins. In addition, the Pioneer Village cabins and the historic collections within the cabins are not well-known outside of Ferndale, and the existing wooden stage is nearing the end of its lifespan.

Finally, the Ferndale community lacks a designated warming and cooling center, forcing residents to travel to Bellingham in inclement weather, often at night and without reliable transport. The Pioneer Pavilion includes sufficient centralized space, but lacks air conditioning in the summer, or other supporting equipment and supplies during the winter.

**Solution:** The majority of recommended expenditures represent one-time costs that will serve to dramatically enhance the visitor experience to the Pioneer Village. Costs necessary to repair the exterior of the cabins will not only improve their appearance, but will serve to decrease future repair and replacement costs. These improvements will re-establish the Village as a regional tourism draw.

With regard to the visitor experience overall, funding will support the construction of a new stage that can be used to attract larger and more various attractions in an open-air setting, creating an additional draw to the area. Funding to support a modification of the park entry itself, including its visibility from the public right of way, will create a more-attractive entry effect.

**ARPA Nexus:** Aid to impacted industries (tourism): due to the pandemic, the Village cabin tours were cancelled in 2020. Although they were re-established in 2021, tour revenues were just sixty percent of revenues in 2019. Further, stage fundraising planned to take place as part of the annual Old Settler's Picnic beginning in 2020 was put on for the last two years, as a result of the pandemic. Delayed investments and lost revenue for non-profit organizations resulting from the pandemic are both eligible ARPA expenditures. The planned improvements are intended to provide a COVID-safe experience as well as to position the Village as an attractive local/regional alternative. The City calculates that a majority of visitors to Pioneer Park also spend money in Downtown Ferndale, and that these combined improvements would generate significant additional tourist spending within the Downtown core.

A community warming/cooling center/shelter, together with improved ventilation capacity, also meets ARPA eligibility requirements and are specifically described by the Interim Final Rule.