



Concept Paper: The Appomattox River Trail

Friends of the Lower Appomattox River (FOLAR)

Project: Proposal to develop a detailed community planning document to complete linear park and trail development along the Lower Appomattox River as a solution that will help with sustainable management of the river's resources and increase access to outdoor recreation to improve the quality of life in the communities within the Tri-cities and surrounding counties.

Existing Conditions: The Appomattox River is a major tributary of the James River and an important regional asset that is unique and irreplaceable. The lower portion of the river in the FOLAR service area meanders 23 miles eastward through six jurisdictions: the Counties of Chesterfield, Dinwiddie, and Prince George, and the Cities of Colonial Heights, Hopewell and Petersburg, and is a valuable resource for commerce, health, and recreation. The entire 23 miles have been designated a 'Virginia Scenic River' by the General Assembly. Two previous (1999 and 2002) foundational guiding plans for the Trail development were commissioned by the Crater Planning District Commission in partnership with FOLAR representatives. As a result of those plans, FOLAR has built \$2+ million in parks and trail infrastructure and helps to maintain 11 miles of walkable trails as well as 11 parks and seven public river access points. There is currently no cohesive identification or signage along the trail and approximately half of the completed trail would benefit from improvements to accommodate multi-use and future expansion.

Community Need: Studies show that communities benefit from accessible trails and linear parks that give people of all skills and abilities the option to be active and to incorporate exercise into their daily routines, whether for recreation or non-motorized transportation. Trails are safe places for walking and jogging, bicycling, horseback riding, family and social outings, and access to river recreation. Trails also connect people to places they want to go, such as schools, transit centers, businesses, and neighborhoods. Linear parks and trails are community assets that can serve a catalytic role in economic development. Linear parks and trails can serve to protect our natural environment and the water quality of our river by controlling erosion and creating public awareness and involvement.

The challenge in our region is that there is limited public access to and availability of linear parks and trails designed for safe and inclusive use along the Appomattox River corridor.

Goals and Objectives: The communities along the Lower Appomattox River are poised to develop more river access opportunities with the goal of benefit to the region's economy, public health, and environmental quality. This proposal to design a detailed regional community driven plan for linear park and trail development incorporating branding and wayfaring/interpretive signage along the Lower Appomattox River has the following objectives:

- Provide a coordinated approach to identifying: Route location and aesthetics, access sites, and connections to other regional trails; Property/conservation easement acquisition opportunities/constraints; Facility opportunities (amphitheaters, bridges, boardwalks, natural and/or deck parks, recreational/educational buildings, parking, commercial integration points, etc.); Trail design standards and specifications; Cost ranges; Phasing; and Maintenance considerations.
- Develop branding and signage that establishes identity and continuity to enhance the trail experience, reduce barriers to trail engagement, increase learning opportunities, and facilitate mapping and tourism communications.
- Create a tool for securing funding to implement the plan and complete the Lower Appomattox River Heritage Trail and other identified structural assets.

The long-term goal of this project is to improve the quality of life, increase the culture of health and active lifestyle, and conserve and protect the natural river environment for individuals and families in Petersburg and surrounding communities through well planned and executed multi-use trail development.

Planning Process: To conduct the planning process, FOLAR will contract with a qualified planning and engineering firm and a branding/signage design firm to serve as planning process partners. Members of the engineering team will utilize existing studies and plans, develop an inventory analysis and base GIS mapping, collect field data identifying terrain and environmental considerations, and then with stakeholder input, formulate trail layouts and identify facility location opportunities. The branding/signage team will conduct a brand study, and with stakeholder input through focus group meetings create naming and identity evaluation and recommendations, explore logo/art concepts, and develop signage system platform and templates.

Community involvement: Representatives from the localities as well as stakeholder organizations, including the Crater and Richmond PDC's, Cameron Foundation, John Randolph Foundation, Historic Petersburg and Hopewell Foundations, Crater Planning District Commission, Petersburg Area Regional Tourism and area Chambers of Commerce as well as the James River Association, and state agencies including VA Department of Conservation and Recreation will be engaged during the development of the plan through interviews and facilitated focus groups. The planning team will schedule opportunities for targeted public input.

Deliverables: The final planning document will detail all the collected data and relations to existing and proposed trails. Identification of access points, bridging and trail types and potential facility location points. Recommendations for various surfaces of trails... stone, boardwalks, ground level decking, asphalt, mulch for different trail sections. Cost ranges for such elements presented in the plan for use with fund development. Branding and signage recommendations with templates will be provided in a compiled portfolio.

Evaluation of Plan Implementation:

FOLAR will be responsible for ensuring the plan is developed in a timely manner. After the plan is developed, FOLAR will identify appropriate partners and funding sources to implement the plan. FOLAR will work with localities and stakeholders to garner resources necessary to fully implement the linear parks and trail recommendations of the plan.

Short-term results of plan implementation will be measured by completion of branding and signage fabrication and installation according to phasing schedule and the number of successfully completed trails segment projects recommended by the plan. Long-term results of plan implementation include complete buildout and connectivity of the trail and increased visitation to parks and trails.

Existing partnerships in place for the proposed work: The Crater Planning District Commission (CPDC) partners with FOLAR on environmental and tourism-related planning projects. FOLAR works in partnership with leadership in each of the six localities in its service area to develop and maintain all trails and facilities it has completed. The FOLAR project team will include board members with engineering and planning expertise.