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FOLAR completes master plan for 20+ miles of trails and signage along lower Appomattox River

PETERSBURG, VA — After an intensive 12-month process that launched with a \$100,000 proactive grant from The Cameron Foundation last spring, Friends of the Lower Appomattox River (FOLAR) is releasing its Appomattox River Trail (ART) Master Plan. The document represents the combined efforts of FOLAR and two consulting design companies – Land Planning and Design Associates as well as AB Design – along with significant input from regional stakeholders and the public.

The ART Master Plan is a guide to locating and prioritizing shared-use trails with a coordinated signage system through the six municipalities that border the lower Appomattox River. The area encompasses the counties of Chesterfield, Dinwiddie and Prince George, and the cities of Colonial Heights, Hopewell and Petersburg. The document is presented in two parts. Part I focuses on the trail plan, and Part II focuses on the corresponding signage plan – a unique aspect of the project. The planned trail and signage offer walkers and cyclists safe, enjoyable connections to recreational opportunities, greenspace and nature, as well as connections to historic sites and structures, businesses, jobs, schools and transit.

As part of the plan development process, FOLAR and the AB Design studio also engaged stakeholders and community members in development of the trail identity to create a logo-brand that expresses the Appomattox River Trail's culture, philosophy and image. The resulting ART logo gives a sense of place for the trail and is the centerpiece of the Part II Signage Master Plan.

“Our region is fortunate to have a designated state Scenic River with stunning natural beauty and incredible historic sites and structures as well as potential for premier recreational opportunities. The Appomattox River Trail will connect them and make them available for everyone,” said FOLAR Chair Ken Newman.

Since FOLAR was founded in 2001 with the support of the Crater Planning District Commission, a central part of the organization’s community-driven vision has been to create a trail connecting the six river municipalities. The ART master plan project builds on years of developing partnerships and community outreach by FOLAR to engage businesses, industry, government and thousands of volunteers, so far producing 10+ miles of trail and \$3.5 million of investment in the region. Through these partnerships, and with significant capacity-building support from The Cameron Foundation to strengthen FOLAR’s operations, FOLAR has successfully led the completion of the ART Master Plan and moved the vision one step closer to reality.

“The Appomattox River is an essential resource that traverses six of the seven localities within The Cameron Foundation’s footprint,” noted Cameron President J. Todd Graham. “FOLAR’s creation of the ART master plan for a cohesive trail system and signage brings our communities together to help promote a culture of health across the entire region. This project is well aligned with the Foundation’s mission to transform area communities into a healthy, vibrant and economically vital region,” he explained.

The ART Master Plan is comprised of several components. It provides an inventory of existing trails and identifies the preferred routes. It presents information on trail types as well as corresponding wayfinding signage. It offers guidance to assist with plan implementation, including prioritization of more than 60 proposed trail segments and a summary of potential funding sources. The plan also includes an assessment report on the environmental impact of the proposed trail routes.

Through an additional grant from the Crater Health District under the Virginia Department of Health, the ART Master Plan incorporates recommendations for pedestrian amenities, walkable

trail connections, and corresponding signage and mapping in both Hopewell and Petersburg to provide residents more opportunities to add exercise into their daily routines. For this part of the plan, the health department directed the focus on the two cities as part of the agency's efforts to improve low community health rankings in both places.

A large body of evidence shows that time visiting nature can provide many measureable, beneficial changes in health. Furthermore, studies available through organizations such as [American Trails](#) show that accessible trails strengthen communities by improving the environment, catalyzing economic growth, and promoting and supporting social equity.

"Promoting healthy and active outdoor recreation, connecting people and places, and energizing local economies are all important objectives for this plan," said FOLAR Vice-Chair Heather Barrar, who led the master plan project for FOLAR and is employed by Chesterfield County as a principal planner. "The plan recommends several concepts for connecting the ART to other trails and community assets, including ultimately a connection at the Benjamin Harrison Bridge to the Virginia Capital Trail." Another objective of the ART is to communicate trail priorities with one voice and one plan, which will make implementation more streamlined, efficient and cost effective, Barrar noted.

"This has been a huge effort on the part of the consultants and FOLAR, and it encompassed the entire community," said Wendy Austin, executive director of FOLAR. "We feel that we now have a comprehensive and useful tool for communicating the vision of building the trail. Successful implementation will take time, cooperation, diligence, and of course, funding. Developing a unified body of support for the plan will be critical to acquiring funding for implementation."

The implementation of the ART Master Plan will be an on-going, coordinated effort involving each of the six municipalities, FOLAR, the Crater Planning District Commission, and key community stakeholders like The Cameron Foundation and the John Randolph Foundation, both of which recently awarded grants to FOLAR for operational support.

FOLAR's next steps are to distribute the completed plan to key stakeholders and each of the six municipalities for review and to present it to the community in a series of public and group meetings. FOLAR welcomes invitations to present the plan to community groups and associations.

Links to the full plan can be found here:

<http://folar-va.org/projects/appomattox-river-trail-and-signage-master-plan/>

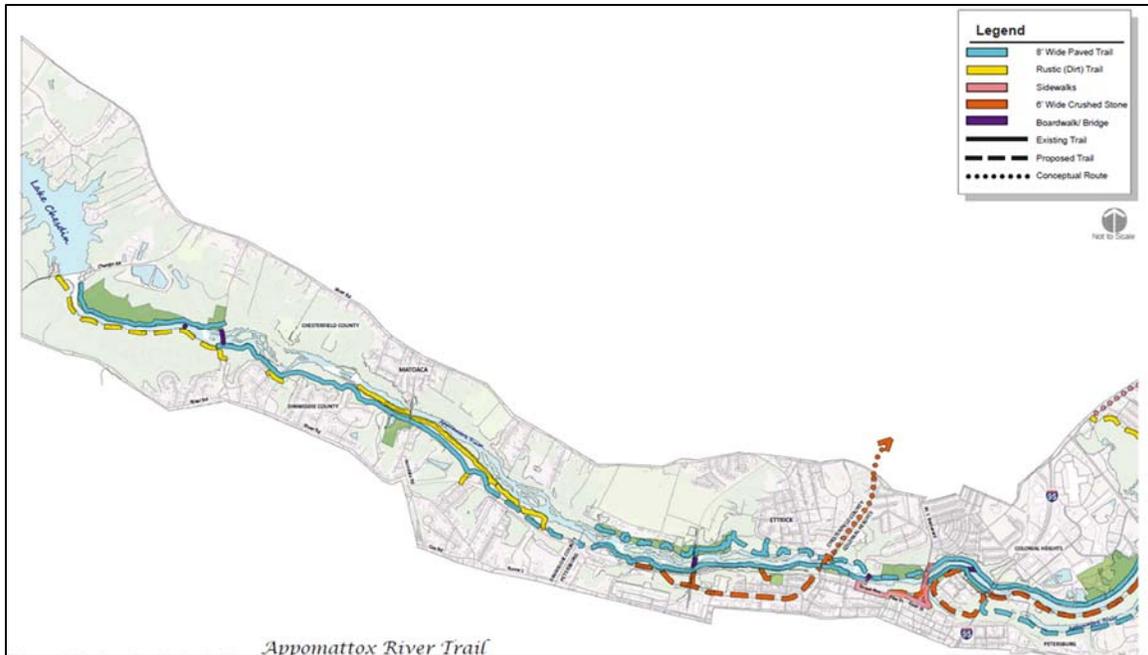
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About FOLAR

Friends of the Lower Appomattox River (FOLAR) is the only organization in the Tri-Cities and surrounding counties dedicated to conserving and protecting the natural, cultural and recreational resources along the Lower Appomattox River. FOLAR has served the region as a registered 501c3 nonprofit organization since 2001 working to develop river stewardship, improve parks, establish trails, access the river, and protect special places. Additional information can be found on the FOLAR website, www.folar-va.org, or by contacting FOLAR's Executive Director Wendy Austin at austinwam@gmail.com; 804-861-1666 office; or 804-543-0325 cell. Photo contact: Ken Newman; Kennewman@hotmail.com

About The Cameron Foundation

The Cameron Foundation strives to transform the Tri-Cities and surrounding counties into a healthy, vibrant and economically vital region by strategically leveraging resources for community impact. Founded in 2003, it is a private foundation that was formed from the proceeds of the sale of Southside Regional Medical Center by the Hospital Authority of the City of Petersburg. Its service area includes the region historically served by the hospital and includes the cities of Petersburg, Colonial Heights and Hopewell; the counties of Dinwiddie, Prince George and Sussex; and the portion of Chesterfield County lying south of Route 10. Since the Foundation began grantmaking in 2004, it has awarded more than \$80 million to organizations serving residents of this area. More information about The Cameron Foundation is available on its website, www.camfound.org, or by telephone at 804-732-8900.



Appomattox River Trail



Caption: Top map shows the western portion of the proposed Appomattox River Trail, from Lake Chesdin straddling Dinwiddie and Chesterfield Counties through City of Petersburg to Rosalyn Park in Colonial Heights. Bottom map shows the eastern portion from Prince George County through City of Hopewell as depicted in the Appomattox River Trail Part I Master Plan.



Caption: The logo developed by AB Design Studio with stakeholder and public input expresses the Appomattox River Trail's culture, philosophy and image. It gives a sense of place for the trail and is the centerpiece of the Appomattox River Trail Master Plan Part II Signage Master Plan.