

FOLAR

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outreach by FOLAR to engage businesses, industry, government, and thousands of volunteers, so far producing over 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 measurable, 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.

The 2017 FOLAR RiverFest - Celebrate our River! will be held Saturday, April 29, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Ferndale Appomattox Riverside Park. Parking across bridge on River Road in Matoaca, shuttle available.




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