

First phase of Rivanna plan released
written by Newspark Team | December 20, 2018



The first step of an eventual master plan for the riverfront in Charlottesville and Albemarle County has come to fruition.

The initial phase of the Rivanna Corridor Study, facilitated by the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission, has a goal of making the river a center of economic development, recreation and cooperation between the city and the county. The scope of the study area stretches a half-mile out from both sides of the Rivanna River from the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir to Milton Road.

“... The Rivanna Planning Committee did an excellent job in identifying, defining and prioritizing the existing conditions and current assets of the river corridor along the urban areas of the river between Charlottesville and Albemarle County,” TJPDC Executive Director Chip Boyles said in an email. “The committee worked very hard to develop a recommended scope of work to continue this process with a more detailed Visioning and Master Planning process to include extensive community engagement.”

In 2016, the City Council and Albemarle’s Board of Supervisors decided to create a formal riverfront plan and directed the TJPDC to develop it. The first phase — an inventory of the existing conditions along the Rivanna — began in 2017. The city and the county spent \$7,500 each on this phase.

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“It’s very early in their process. What we have is just maps of existing conditions, very GIS-based. It doesn’t particularly tell a story of what the corridor is about,” said Peter Krebs, of the Piedmont Environmental Council.

“The next phase is about visioning, but I think a project like this needs to really understand what we have there in the past and present tense before looking forward. What is the area’s history? We know that it is very rich. What are the main economic activities past and present? What is the character of the valley and its surrounding land uses? What are its primary resources thinking beyond what we see on a map?”

The second phase — which will include outreach, research and the drafting of the master plan — is expected to cost \$75,000, and \$6,500 of that will be paid through a match from the TJPDC, according to the draft scope of work. It kicked off in October and is expected to be completed sometime in 2019.

“Upon a Notice to Proceed from Albemarle and Charlottesville, the committee will re-engage and begin the community engagement and visioning process,” Boyles said. “An extended benefit of this project is the engagement of the Rivanna River Basin Commission, who have asked the TJPDC to complete the same analysis and visioning process for the rural areas of the Rivanna from Greene County all the way to the James River in Fluvanna County.”

The Rivanna River is 42 miles long and empties into the James River near Columbia in Fluvanna. Its watershed includes portions of Orange, Greene, Louisa, Fluvanna and Nelson counties, and about four miles of it serves as the eastern boundary between Charlottesville and Albemarle.

The detailed master plan is to be created in the third phase, which does not yet have an estimated cost, but is expected to be completed in 2019 or 2020.

“This is an opportunity to create a plan that tells a story,” Krebs said. “Although I wouldn’t say that the Rivanna is a forgotten part of our community, like many places it suffers a bit for being on the edge of the two localities. And it still probably does not play as great a role in our civic life as it could or should.”

“This is a great opportunity for the city and county to think collaboratively about how best to use and preserve this zone, which is so rich but also fragile. They should be thinking about economic development, culture, housing and transportation in ways that are sensitive to the fact that it is a river and a living system.”

The Rivanna River Corridor website is