

Partnership leads to key parkland purchase  
written by Newspark Team | April 23, 2016

The city of Charlottesville has partnered with hometown musician Dave Matthews to purchase land that will serve as a critical link for the Rivanna Trail.

"It's an excellent addition to the park system that can not only accommodate the trail, but the upland forest is in really good shape and offers nice environmental education opportunities," said Brian Daly, Charlottesville's parks and recreation director.

In all, the city has acquired 27 acres along its southern border, near Azalea Park. The largest section is 24.2 acres located in Albemarle County, off Old Lynchburg Road.

The Fornes family has owned the land since before Interstate 64 was constructed, according to Rex Linville, land conservation officer with the Piedmont Environmental Council.

"They used to have a family farm here," Linville said, adding that the Forneses would sell watermelons and other produce at Fry's Spring neighborhood stores.

In 2008, a Georgia-based developer filed an application to build a 280-unit apartment complex, but preliminary plans were not approved by the county's Planning Commission.

After that, Linville said he began negotiating with three sisters who inherited the property to see if they would be interested in selling the land as a park.

"They wanted a lot of money for the property because they had been approached by Oxford Properties telling them it was worth a fortune," Linville said.

The city became interested because trail planners sought property for a trail easement along Moores Creek, but the local government didn't have the full amount of money to meet the family's price.

"There's a lot of long-term benefit in terms of water quality and having these streams in public lands," Daly said.

Linville then contacted representatives of Dave Matthews and the band's manager, Coran Capshaw, to see if they would be interested in helping with the acquisition.

According to city officials, the two formed a limited liability corporation, called Old Lynchburg Road Park, to assist. The city purchased a third of the property for \$350,000 and the LLC purchased the other two shares.

The donation to the city closed earlier this month.

"It took quite some time for the deal to come together," Daly said.

"It is a pivotal acquisition, and I can't thank the city, Dave Matthews and Coran Capshaw enough for making it happen," Linville said.

The acquisition meets the favor of one Old Lynchburg Road resident who has campaigned for years about increased traffic caused by residential redevelopments just over the line in Albemarle.

"Years ago [there were] rumblings about [the land] being sold for another high-rise ... apartment building, which was a horrible idea to consider," said Jeanne Chase. "How wonderful to have the parks department in charge of maintaining this land and working with the terrain and not against it."

The property will restore a broken link in the Rivanna Trail.

A Fry's Spring property owner withdrew an easement a few years ago, forcing the closure of a link between Sunset Avenue and McElroy Court. That has caused the trail to be routed along neighborhood streets.

"He closed it and put a chain across it, and so the Rivanna Trail Foundation has had no connection through here," Linville said.

Linville said the city also has worked with the owners of the Eagles Landing apartment complex to obtain an easement farther north. The deed for a 20-foot-wide easement, including the 10-foot-wide path, was recorded in January.

"The new land ensures the Rivanna Trail is permanent from Sunset to Old Lynchburg and will likely have space for additional spurs, as well," said Michael Holroyd, a member of the Rivanna Trail Foundation's board of directors.

The city will install a 10-foot-wide multi-use path, but Daly said he is not sure when that will happen. He said this section will be an urban trail similar to the one at Riverview Park that also carries a portion of the Rivanna Trail.

Linville supports that kind of pathway, rather than one more like the Appalachian Trail.

"The reason I think that is a superior alternative is because it's the type of thing a mom with a stroller, kids on bikes or something someone from Fry's Spring could use to get to Wegmans," referring to a grocery store under construction at 5th Street Station.

Linville said the acquisition is a sign that many groups can work together to obtain more public park land through leveraging limited government funding.

"The city is being very proactive in acquisitions like this that are crucial for preserving the possibility of trail corridors in the future," Linville said. "If we don't buy these pieces of the puzzle now and start stitching them together, it's never going to happen."