

Plans for South Fork Rivanna boat launch, park outlined  
written by Newspark Team | July 19, 2018



Albemarle County is moving forward with plans for a new park and boat launch on the Rivanna River.

In June, the county's Department of Parks and Recreation submitted an application for Comprehensive Plan Compliance to develop and manage a boat launch and a small riverfront trail park near the intersection of Millers Cottage Lane and Rio Mills Road.

"There would be a wood and concrete structure for a boat ramp, so you can pull your kayak or canoe right into the water," said Amy Smith, assistant director of parks and recreation.

Smith shared the proposal at a meeting of the Places29 North Community Advisory Committee at the Hollymead Fire Rescue Station on Thursday.

The land for the proposed Rio Mills Boat Landing and Trailhead Park is owned by Crockett Corp., which also leases property to the Monticello United Soccer Club on the opposite side of U.S. 29.

Cameron Langille, senior planner for Albemarle County, said Crockett Corp. has agreed to donate the Rio Mills property to the county once plans for the park are approved. The heavily wooded, parcel is currently zoned as Rural Area.

"There isn't much that can be done with this property in its current zoning and condition," said Steve Janes, chairman of the Places29 North CAC.

The park and boat launch are listed as a \$1,164,117 expense in the county's Capital Improvement Program for fiscal years 2019-23. Smith said state funding that once was designated for the project is no longer available.

Albemarle's Comprehensive Plan calls for the provision of boat access to the South Fork of the Rivanna River near U.S. 29.

According to a project description in the CIP, the county has been attempting to secure property to improve the access point near the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir dam since 1995.

"The current boat ramp near the dam is not well designed and has limited parking. The informal popular access point [at] Woodlands Road is crowded and dangerous," the description reads.

Darden Towe Park — the closest county park to the dam — is about three miles downriver.

A concept plan for the riverfront park at Rio Mills features trails that would be accessible from Rio Mills Road and U.S. 29. Smith said the park would include restrooms, a picnic shelter and benches along the trails.

"If someone wanted to come out and just sit and enjoy the river, they would be able to access that whole stretch," she said.

The Rio Mills property is not yet accessible to the public. However, Crockett Corp. allows the Rivanna River Regatta to host the annual canoe and kayak race on the site.

Dave Dolak, organizer of the regatta and administrator of the Cville Paddlers Facebook group, attended Thursday's committee meeting. He said the 25 parking spaces proposed for the Rio Mills park might not be sufficient.

"Everybody [on the Facebook group] is constantly asking, 'Where can we put in?'" Dolak said. "This new boat launch is long overdue."

Crockett Corp. also lets the Rivanna River Company launch boat excursions from the property. The company recently leased acres on the old Circus Grounds next to East High Street for its new headquarters.

"We have a spot that works for us, but this park would be a great amenity for the public," said Gabe Silver, co-owner of the Rivanna River Company. "The main area [near the reservoir] that the public uses now is a long walk through the woods, and starts in the middle of a rapid. It's really not beginner friendly."

Langille said the application for the Rio Mills Boat Landing and Trailhead Park is tentatively scheduled to go before the county Planning Commission on Aug. 14.

After that it will be sent to the Board of Supervisors, which can approve it via its consent agenda.

Albemarle's five-year CIP also includes \$75,000 for engineering and design work for planned upgrades to the Milton Boat Landing near Randolph Mill Lane, about five miles east of Charlottesville.