

Rivanna River planning projects endorsed by city, county commissions
written by Newspark Team | January 24, 2017



The planning commissions of Albemarle County and Charlottesville hope to accelerate efforts to preserve the Rivanna River and make it a centerpiece of future development.

At a joint meeting of the planning commissions on Tuesday, Chip Boyles, director of the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission, reviewed strategic planning goals for the river that a community task force first presented more than a year ago.

“At the city level, especially, it is important to take full advantage of the river as an economic development opportunity,” Boyles said. “Use it as an asset. Make it a front door, not a back door.”

The Rivanna River is a tributary of the James River that marks part of Charlottesville’s eastern city limits.

In 2014, the Charlottesville City Council and Albemarle’s Board of Supervisors directed the TJPDC to form the Rivanna Renaissance Committee to offer guidance for the future use of the river and surrounding land. The committee’s study area also includes the neighboring counties of Fluvanna and Greene.

The committee consisted of elected officials and staff from the city and county, as well as leaders of several local nonprofits focused on housing and environmental issues. The committee recommended several action steps in 2015 after meeting nine times.

"We completed a lot of our work quite a while ago, and it has just been languishing," Boyles said. "We're just waiting for direction on where to take it from here."

Six city planning commissioners and four county planning commissioners were present for Tuesday's meeting. All voted to recommend the Rivanna Renaissance Committee's plan to the City Council and the Board of Supervisors, respectively.

County Supervisors Norman Dill and Rick Randolph attended the meeting. Randolph said that Albemarle County planned to use surplus funds to kick-start the planning process for the Rivanna River. "I can assure you it is in the [county] budget," Randolph said.

As a first step, Rivanna Renaissance Committee recommended that the City Council and Board of Supervisors draft a memorandum of understanding that would officially establish the committee as a permanent advisory body. It specifically recommended that the committee include representatives from the Rivanna Conservation Alliance and the Thomas Jefferson Water and Soil District.

As a next step, the committee called for the creation of a new map of the river that city and county staff could use for permit reviews and joint projects. The map would include detailed information about water quality, historic uses of the river, future development and recreation sites. The estimated cost of creating this map is \$15,000.

County Planning Commissioner Bruce Dotson said this map should identify "vistas and vantage points that we want to keep an eye on, and make sure we don't lose."

The Rivanna Renaissance Committee proposed visiting river-centric cities like Roanoke and Greenville, South Carolina, and seeking input from the public to create a concept plan for the Rivanna River corridor. This step would cost about \$50,000.

"Most of this can be done in-house," Boyles said, adding that the cost could be lower if the city and county staff devoted more time to the project.

The final objective recommended by the Rivanna Renaissance Committee is to create a master development plan for land use and development near the river. The master plan would guide the formation of new greenways and include measures to enhance water quality. It would also include designs for amenities like boat launches and docks.

Creating the master plan would require the assistance of consultants and design firms and is estimated to cost an additional \$300,000. Boyles it could be possible to accomplish some of the work through a master plan for the Pantops area that Albemarle County might pursue in the future.

In a public comment, Jeff Werner of the Piedmont Environmental Council voiced support for the Rivanna Renaissance agenda.

"For too long, the river has been a boundary between the city and county," Werner said. "I'm delighted to see some changes... Our futures are connected. We have got to connect the city and the county."

Charlottesville Planning Commissioner Kurt Keesecker said that the city should consider including the Rivanna Renaissance initiatives in its budget for capital improvement projects. "I think we have to make the tools that we use to do our planning focus around [specific] places," he said.