

Tourism

“Where the Mountains Meet the River”

By Leslie Fiddler
Warren County Report

Let's Go Ride a Bike

In spring my mind turns to cycling. High speed coasting on a beautiful spring day is one of life's sweet pleasures.

But I don't have to wait for spring to cycle. It's pretty easy to ride around Front Royal all four seasons. Oh there is some fine tuning to be done but overall, as do many other residents, I've got easy access to Main Street, the library and Bing Crosby Stadium from our neighborhood. However I do feel somewhat trapped within the environs of the town's limits and wish that it was safe to bicycle with the boys in town and beyond.

To satisfy this itch some folks take their families to Sherando Park, others use the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal out of Harper's Ferry, the W & OD Trail in Purcellville and the Greenbriar River Trail near Galax. Occasionally professional cycling teams stay at the Quality Inn and train on Skyline Drive.

Front Royal Citizens want Greenways and Walking Trails

In the recent Quality of Life survey town residents ranked creating greenspaces and walking trails #2 on their list of recommendations and Town Manager Michael Graham knows where to find a plan. In 1992 “Where the Mountains Meet the River: Front Royal's Plan for Parks, Trails, Bikepaths and Greenways” was adapted into the town's comprehensive plan.

For folks who've moved here since 1992 please let me tell you that this is one glorious piece of work. Produced under the leadership of then town planner Kimberly Fogle (now

in Berryville), the plan links Shenandoah National Park to the confluence of the North and South Forks of the Shenandoah River with a network of walking trails, biking trails and greenways.

I first heard about the plan from a lifetime resident at a soccer practice. When it was proposed the plan captured the imagination of the town but evidently it was adapted without any sense of urgency. The smallest bit of it exists between Happy Creek and Commerce Ave. - a good Commerce Ave. parallel route for pedestrians and cyclists but lacking any identifying signage.

But now it's 2007 and our region is at a critical juncture. Development pressures are huge. Planners are trying to keep growth at a reasonable rate. The Shenandoah River is in crisis. Royal Phoenix is coming on stream. Big box shopping is here and it is time to implement the plan before the town and county are built out.

Build it and they will come

Besides, people WANT to cycle, wheel and walk. They want to get fit. They are looking for local activities. They want to save time and money. They are tired of driving. Wheeling and walking routes would serve everyone in the area. Walkers could walk. Families could cycle to their baseball and soccer games and to the park. Children could safely ride to the library. People could exercise while running errands. Workers could commute by bike or foot. Visitors could wheel or walk to Shenandoah National Park and to the Shenandoah River, stay in local accommodations and eat and shop locally.

Providing a good walking and wheeling infrastructure would promote resident health,

support tourism and attract the culturally creative to the area - the forerunners of clean industry. Already we have some Appalachian Trail fans who've made Front Royal their home. I have seen greenways, walking and wheeling paths revitalize the local economy (Massif Centrale, France), become community focal points (Lansing, Michigan), and become well used commuter and recreation routes (Victoria and Vancouver Canada). Not incidentally, Front Royal would become an even better place to live.

Shopping for Money

How the town will implement “Where the Mountains meet the River” remains to be seen. I imagine they will build it in stages as funds become available. I imagine a committee will be struck, that the town and county will cooperate and there will be fundraising involved. I know that the plan got stuck once before on the issue of land ownership and I hope most sincerely that landowners will realize that contributing to this project is a significant public service. In Luray the Hawksbill Greenway successfully co-exists with a farmer's field. Good luck Town of Front Royal as you develop this project.

Connect the dots

Cycling doesn't have to stop at the town limits. Imagine being able to cycle between Warren, Page, Shenandoah and Frederick Counties. In 2004 the Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission produced “Walking and Wheeling the Northern Shenandoah Valley: a plan to improve local and regional pedestrian and bicycle access and linkages for recreation and civil war heritage tourism.” It's another vi-

You want \$14k? Here's \$120k for three years, take it, please!

By Roger Bianchini
Warren County Report

On April 9, a week after having been told by the Economic Development Authority that it was time to put up or shut up in pursuing a coordinated plan for future community economic and social development, the Front Royal Town Council decided to put up, or perhaps to do a little economic redevelopment of its own.

After the EDA didn't show up for a follow-up, April 2 work session requested by the town to discuss funding implementation of a 20-year Roadmap to the Future, some figured the town-county Economic Development Authority had blown getting the town to fund the \$14,000 share the EDA was asking for, along with \$36,000 from the county and \$70,000 the EDA was going to fund from its own operating budget.

But rather than approve or disapprove the requested \$14,000 contribution to a one-year contract with international consultant SRI International, by a 5-0 vote the Front Royal Town Council approved funding the full \$120,000 cost of the annual contract for three years - with some strings attached.

Among those potentially expensive strings are the EDA's assumption of full responsibility for the town's tourism budget, which was \$309,309 in the existing budget year and is proposed at \$332,480 in the coming fiscal year. The EDA would also assume funding responsibility for the Downtown Business Associations' entry into

the Virginia Main Street Program at a base cost of \$25,000 per year for three years should the town-endorsed DBA application be accepted.

The town plan will also allow it to keep the tourism dollars it collects through lodging taxes to fund “tourism related” infrastructure. And after waiving rentals and utilities on tourism spaces for three years, the town will collect rent and utilities on tourism spaces from the EDA at market value.

The adopted town revenue figures for the 2006-07 fiscal year included \$307,000 in lodging taxes and \$1.2 million in meals taxes. Those revenues go into the town's General Fund to support not only tourism, but other general revenue expenses as needed.

However, as was pointed out during a Special Meeting of the EDA board called on April 12 to review the plan (see related story), the state directs lodging tax revenue toward tourism.

Front Royal Mayor James Eastham said the compromise kills two birds with one stone. “At the March 26 work session during the Main Street Business Association's Main St. Program presentation it became very apparent that there was a duplication of effort in the scope of the work in the Main St. Program and the EDA's SRI initiative. Both groups had asked the town council to help fund their efforts. Council asked that I look to find a workable solution for both groups that meets their respective needs without having to fund a duplication of efforts - this is a result of that.”

sionary plan needing political will, foresight and productive

conscientious work for its realization.