

## County of Spotsylvania

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# MEMORANDUM

TO: Spotsylvania County Board of Supervisors

THROUGH: Wanda Parrish, Director of Planning

FROM: Jacob Pastwik, Planner III

DATE: July 9, 2019

RE: Funding Assistance Requested by the City of Fredericksburg for the Virginia Central Railway Trail Hazel Run Bridge Project

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From the City Manager:

*A few years ago, the City obtained VDOT Smart Scale funding for a steel bridge over Hazel Run, adjacent to the Kingswood subdivision. Since then, the cost of steel has increased and our once-generous budget has a shortfall of \$135,000.*

*We could back off from this specific project or take different approaches, but there are three problems. First, dropping this Smart Scale project and submitting a Transportation Alternatives Program application would require compliance with the standards of a full federal project, increasing the cost significantly. (The current funding is state only and the project is ready to be implemented.) Second, a redesign of the bridge would re-open the environmental review process. The steel design was designed to span over historic bridge abutments, without touching them. A wood frame structure, as a logical alternative, would have to rest on the historic abutments and would require a new review. Third, the Kingswood subdivision has been involved in the project planning because access to the construction site would be through their HOA property. The VCR Trail not only serves Fredericksburg citizens, but is popular with Spotsylvania residents as well, who must cross Hazel Run without the benefit of a bridge. Consequently, this bridge serves both of our constituencies.*

*The City has \$160,000 in Smart Scale funding in hand. We have worked through all of the environmental review items. We have an agreement with Kingswood to*

*obtain access to the construction site. We have gone through the procurement process and have a good bid to construct the bridge. We simply have a gap of \$135,000 to fill before we can get this project underway.*

*I am going to recommend that we cancel the project unless we can find \$135k. Will Spotsylvania make this contribution?*

In consideration of the request and identification of findings, additional staff review of the project concerning Spotsylvania County is provided below:

### Hazel Run Bridge Project

Staff reached out to the County Public Works Department to inquire about the nature of the construction materials market (including steel) to get a sense of that market and historic trends in pricing. Presently cost increases for steel have burdened the City's ability to fully fund the Hazel Run bridge project. As per County Public Works, "like every commodity, steel will move up and down." As per Public Works, the price of steel tends to correlate with the price of oil. Based on Public Works feedback, staff can't be certain that the cost to construct the bridge will always trend upward from this point forward. This may or may not be the most advantageous time to construct the bridge from a cost standpoint. Planning staff reached out to the City for their perspective regarding the active bid and future prospects. As per feedback received, *"the bid we have expires 90 days from bid opening. It is a good price and there is no reason to believe we will get a better one any time soon. The funding is also from the state. If we have to let these funds go, the other potential sources will be federal. As a consequence, the overall cost will increase rather than diminish."* Staff agrees introduction of additional funding sources such as those sourced federally will lead to increased costs due to additional level of scrutiny and study associated with federal funding options.

In the short term, construction of the Hazel Run bridge and associated improvements result in a westward VCR Trail extension towards Interstate 95 of no more than 100-200 feet in length. The primary benefit for this extension considering current conditions would be further VCR Trail extension with a fixed point of connection through a homeowner's lot and across Hazel Run for the benefit of Kingswood subdivision users. County and City staff attended a well-attended Kingswood subdivision homeowners meeting on February 23, 2017 to discuss the VCR Trail and City plans to construct the Hazel Run bridge. The City requested access to the Kingswood community as a temporary access for bridge construction. During the Kingswood HOA meeting the community was clear in their intent to establish a private community use only link to the VCR. The community was not supportive of a wider public access that would route trail user traffic through the subdivision. Though options for connecting the City of Fredericksburg portion of the Trail to Spotsylvania County are limited, Planning staff too does not favor routing VCR traffic through the Kingswood subdivision and recommend alternative routes be identified. As a means to proactively work with the Kingswood community on their bridge project in the interest of a private trail access, the City expressed they were "amenable to working with the neighborhood" to "dress up" the Kingswood access to the trail. At that time the cost

to extend a private trail upon a Kingswood Blvd fronting homeowners lot was considered a minor expense that could be absorbed as part of the City's bridge project. Beyond construction of the new bridge and creation of a private access point to the Kingswood subdivision, the trail extension will again dead-end with no justification for further expansion westward unless and until a bicycle and pedestrian only bridge or tunnel is constructed through the Interstate 95 right-of-way, assuming there is mutual interest between the County and City to see such a project come to fruition. The City has maintained interest in eventually establishing a connection in conjunction with the County along the old rail bed and extending their portion of the trail further east at that time. The City has decided not to extend the VCR Trail further toward Interstate 95 beyond this bridge project until Spotsylvania County pursues construction of improvements west of the Interstate and an Interstate crossing is established. Staff reached out to the Virginia Department of Transportation and FAMPO seeking their professional estimate of rough costs associated with construction of a new bicycle/pedestrian bridge or tunnel across the Interstate. To date we have not yet received cost estimates. A similar inquiry in 2016 limited to the concept of a 16' wide bicycle/pedestrian bridge in the same location resulted in an estimate of \$2.5 million or higher. Due to topographic changes from the base of the Interstate to road level it is expected that long approaches with ramps would be an additional cost. Rough cost estimating for a tunnel concept was not solicited at that time.

Out of concern for cost and past feedback from landowners west of Interstate 95 (Twin Springs Subdivision, Hazelwild), County staff has not emphasized trail development along the rail bed with the necessity of a new bicycle/pedestrian only structure and land acquisition in proximity to Interstate 95. Instead, staff has looked to pair the planned Harrison Road widening and Harrison Rd- Interstate 95 bridge replacement projects as a viable means to extend the VCR Trail across the Interstate and further "close the gap" with Fredericksburg. Harrison Road frontage improvements have been viewed more favorably by landowners west of the Interstate. As part of the Comprehensive Plan draft staff has included a draft place holder in case the County ever wants to pursue a major trail crossing along the old rail bed with I-95 tunnel for bike/ped only. Harrison Road has also been identified, paired with planned Harrison Road widening and Interstate bridge replacement where bicycle/pedestrian accommodations are also expected. The "VCR Auxilliary Trail" along Harrison Road appears to be a more viable short term option. Staff would like to know the preference of the Board of Supervisors concerning the VCR Trail in proximity to Interstate 95 considerate of crossing options. Would the Board like to continue to plan for future trail extensions with an ultimate goal of creating a bridge or tunnel through Interstate right-of-way along the old rail bed, or is pairing the trail with planned Harrison road widening and bridge replacement more favorable? As part of Planning, both options can be left "on the table", however some direction from the Board in this matter will provide feedback to the City of Fredericksburg regarding the County position.

### Virginia Central Railway Trail Overview

The partially funded bridge structure is part of the Virginia Central Railway (VCR) Trail. The VCR Trail has been recognized by the Virginia Department of Conservation and

Recreation in the statewide 2018 Virginia Outdoors Plan, the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (FAMPO) 2045 Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, and the 2011 approved Spotsylvania County Trailways Master Plan. Preceding the 2011 Plan, the VCR Trail had been identified within the Spotsylvania County 2002 and 2008 Comprehensive Plan.

The City of Fredericksburg has converted much of the former rail bed to a recreational trail within City limits. Within Spotsylvania County, in the years following the VCR's abandonment, pieces of the corridor were gradually "carved up" and ended up in public and private ownership. A number of linear sections of the corridor still exist, owned by local Homeowners Associations, private property owners, and some still under public control. The County has been able to successfully develop a portion of the corridor as a greenway trail connecting Salem Church Road to Gordon Road that is in use today. Since approval of the 2011 Trailways Master Plan, additional implementation efforts have been made regarding the VCR Trail. A Virginia Land Conservation Fund application was made and an award was granted to the County in 2011 that resulted in securing a recreational trail easement along a roughly 2-mile segment of the Virginia Central Railway Trail between Brock Road and Jackson Trail East. This easement greatly enhances the opportunity to eventually construct a significant historic portion of the planned VCR Trail. An additional VCR easement is expected further west, associated with the sPower project whose approval included dedication of recreational trail easements. The Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (FAMPO), in collaboration with Spotsylvania County, secured Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funds to study the design and alignment of the VCR Trail in 2012. Within the next few years, roadway crossing and frontage improvements associated with VDOT and private development projects are expected to enhance the VCR Trail, extending it eastward from its current termination point at Salem Church Road. In June, 2019 the Spotsylvania County Transportation Committee supported moving forward with a Transportation Alternatives funding application aimed at extending the VCR Trail from its current terminus at Salem Church Road through Harrison Road Park to the intersection of Harrison Road and Salem Church Road where intersection lights exist and VDOT bicycle and pedestrian friendly road crossing improvements are planned to tie into private development driven trail construction along Harrison Road, east of Salem Church Rd.

The trail conversion was chiefly envisioned to utilize the former rail bed as a means of establishing a regional trail corridor linking the City of Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania County, and Orange County. However, through development of the 2011 Trailways Master Plan, numerous impediments and community concerns were noted, resulting in the design and alignment study referenced above and identification of potential deviations from the old rail bed in some areas. In instances of significant physical (development encroachment), environmental, cost, safety barriers (visibility, road crossings, etc.), alternate alignments or bypasses are recognized as beneficial in order to ensure continued progress in the development of this important regional trailway. For instance, at present, eastward extension of the VCR Trail paired with planned Harrison Road widening and Interstate 95 bridge replacement projects appears to be the most viable and cost effective means to cross Interstate 95 with fewest property impacts, resulting in

identification of the VCR Auxiliary Trail as a viable means to bridge Interstate 95 and close the gap between existing Spotsylvania County and City of Fredericksburg segments. The Trailways Master Plan Map has not fully removed the opportunity to pursue development of the historic rail bed alignment leading up to the base of the Interstate north of Harrison Road. There remains potential to pursue easements and construction along the historic rail bed in the area of Interstate 95 but this appears to be a long term option requiring prioritization and a commitment of funds specifically oriented at recreational trail development and a new bicycle/ pedestrian bridge or tunnel through the Interstate 95 right-of-way. There may be an opportunity to explore implementation of the VCR Trail through Interstate right-of-way along the historic rail bed paired with Interstate improvement projects such as the addition of a Harrison Road interchange however this is somewhat speculative until further study and project scope is established. Future development proposals in the area may also provide the opportunity to seek trail construction to the west of Interstate 95 along the old rail bed. Again, this is speculative at this time unless and until a development proposal comes forth.