

Existing Conditions

Local Planning Efforts

Currently the Blacks Run Greenway is the only greenway project under planning within the City of Harrisonburg.

In February of 2000 the City of Harrisonburg adopted a Bicycle plan. The plan's purpose is to improve bicycle transportation in the City. The City's goal is to "create and maintain, through this plan, a viable bicycle transportation network".

See the Access and Transportation section of the Analysis chapter for a detailed synopsis of related planning efforts.

Existing Trails and Greenways

City of Harrisonburg Bicycle Plan: Adopted by City Council in 2000, the bicycle plan outlines planned primary and secondary bicycle routes throughout Harrisonburg. The bicycle plan will be implemented gradually, with bicycle lanes included in new street construction and in future improvements of existing streets within the city. Currently, bicycle lanes have been constructed on a new extension of Neff Avenue.

Foot trail from University Avenue near Port Republic Road to the woods trails and adjacent foot trails in the Edith Carrier Arboretum at James Madison University.

Keister Elementary School nature trail: A short nature trail on the grounds of Keister Elementary School located adjacent to Blacks Run just south of Maryland Ave.

Hillandale Park to Westover Park bike lane/trail (planned): A combination of on- and off-street bike lanes and trails will provide a route for non-motorized vehicles and pedestrians between Hillandale and Westover Parks.

Hillandale Park: A network of cinder and grass trails meander through the park.

Purcell Park: A cinder walking/jogging trail forms a loop around the park's perimeter. The section of this trail along Blacks Run is directly in the proposed Greenway corridor.

Virginia Outdoors Plan

The Virginia Outdoors Plan outlines recreation demand for each Planning District in Virginia and makes recommendations for improvements in these regions. It is prepared by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. The publication is updated every few years.

Harrisonburg, Virginia lies within the Recreation Planning Region PDC 6. The Plan recommends that "each locality develop a trail and greenway plan as part of its comprehensive plan". This plan should make an effort to link existing and proposed trails and greenways into a regional greenways network connecting existing and proposed recreational, cultural, water, business and other resources the community deems desirable. It also recommends that localities determine appropriate roads for bicycle routes. This Greenway Plan addresses these issues. However, the plan only covers the limits of the City of Harrisonburg and does not address connections beyond. The County of Rockingham would need to complete a greenway plan to address these regional connections. Also the Planning District Commission may consider developing such a plan for the region.

The Virginia Outdoors Plan makes specific recommendations for developing a Rail with Trail along the Norfolk-Southern railroad corridor. The Trail would connect Staunton to Harrisonburg along this active but "low volume" line.

Parks and Recreation

The City of Harrisonburg is blessed with a fairly well developed system of parks. The City's program is administered by the Department of Parks and Recreation. Existing recreational facilities include:

Hillandale Park
Kiwanis Park

Morrison Park
Ralph Sampson Park
Purcell Park
Riven Rock Park
Westover Park
Ramblewood Fields
VanPelt Property
Lineweaver Property
Strate Property
National Guard Amory
Price-Rotary Senior Center
Simms Recreation Center
Community Activities Center
Westover Swimming Pool Complex

Public services provided by the City of Harrisonburg have been characterized since the early 1950's by a comprehensive and diverse program of leisure services and recreational spaces. The makeup of the city parks systems includes over 665 acres of property located in various areas within or adjacent to the city limits. One park of 17 acres exists outside the city. The topography varies from land which borders streams, drainage areas and flood plains to rolling acreage with pristine grassy open spaces or mature woodland. Various passive and active recreational uses are available with complimentary facilities, which include an 18-hole golf course, an outdoor and indoor 3 pool swimming complex, various athletic facilities, a 44,000 sq. ft. community activities center and extensive walking/hiking trail systems in several city parks.

The mission statement of the Parks and Recreation Department is to enhance the quality of life and meet the needs of every citizen by providing comprehensive leisure service opportunities. The Departments' mission is also to develop and maintain a safe system of open spaces and public facilities for the use and enjoyment by the community.

The proposed Blacks Run Greenway would enhance and compliment the Departments' mission and encourage and facilitate citizens to use and enjoy the open spaces and recreation facilities within the parks.

Purcell Park is a 70-acre park. Residential and business neighborhoods and Interstate 81 border it. Blacks Run flows through the entire length of the park and an existing trail borders the stream. The intended Greenway corridor would take advantage of the existing trails and upon completion, would allow for trail users to

extend their journeys. In addition, Purcell Park would serve as a trailhead in terms of vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian traffic.

Ramblewood Fields and Westover Park also have direct connections to Greenway corridors. Corridor 4 passes through the Ramblewood Fields property and corridor 6 passes through Westover Park. Although no trails exist along the corridors, both areas are generally open and several alternatives exist for routes through these parks. The possibility of vehicular trailheads located in these parks is very feasible.

Other parks with opportunities for connection to the greenway include Ralph Sampson Park and Hillandale Park. Connections to the Greenway from Ralph Sampson would need to follow existing streets and sidewalks (with the added benefit of providing access to Simms Community Center, a historic building and cultural center in Harrisonburg). A trail connecting Hillandale to Westover Park is now in the planning stages and will be constructed with the assistance of a \$100,000 grant received from the Virginia Division of Conservation and Recreation. Public access through vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle trailheads would be possible in these locations.

Appropriate signage designating trail routes, access and other information would be required in many of these locations and would be complimentary to existing park facilities.

Scenic Areas

Blacks Run, though heavily urbanized along much of its length, provides scenic beauty in a variety of contexts. The proposed Greenway will provide access to Blacks Run—one of the only instances of “wild nature” within the Harrisonburg city limits—as well as to attractive scenic views along the stream in a variety of contexts.

Some notable views along the main stem of Blacks Run from north to south include:

- ✂ Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community property located adjacent to Acorn Drive and Virginia Avenue. This site is proposed as a northern anchor for the Greenway. The site is currently rolling pasture with some mature trees and exposed rock.

- ✂ Blacks Run from the northern headwaters to North Liberty Street north of downtown Harrisonburg. Intermittent open or wooded spaces and remnant agricultural landscapes appear. This area is being rapidly developed and its character may change significantly in the near future.
- ✂ Between North Liberty Street and approximately Jefferson Street, Blacks Run flows through relatively secluded-feeling wooded lots.
- ✂ Through downtown, Blacks Run appears intermittently, with several locations that provide, or could provide, attractive urban green space. Between Gay and Rock Streets, Blacks Run winds through a narrow green area below grade level—an area that could easily be enhanced through landscaping or development as a small park. Between Rock and Wolfe Streets, trees and grass have been planted, creating a pleasing park-like setting behind the Lineweaver apartments. Between Wolfe and Liberty Streets, landscaping in a narrow green band could be easily enhanced. Some flowering ornamental trees have recently been planted on the banks near Liberty Street.
- ✂ Behind Spanky's Restaurant at Water Street, a small green area with a mixture of ornamentals, native plants and weeds could be easily enhanced, providing views from the restaurant windows overlooking Blacks Run and from a walkway between Water Street and Court Square. The Big Spring, Harrisonburg's original water supply, still flows into Blacks Run through a pipe and is visible looking down from the walkway.
- ✂ Blacks Run Park. Located across Blacks Run from the downtown Farmer's Market between Water and Bruce Streets, this small pocket park provides an intimately scaled green space with trees, ornamental plantings, a path and picnic table.
- ✂ From approximately New York Avenue and the Norfolk Southern railroad tracks to near South Avenue, Blacks Run flows through relatively open space alternating between grassy and semi-wooded areas. This stretch of the stream is relatively farther away from adjacent streets and fairly quiet.
- ✂ From about South Main Street, Blacks Run passes through Purcell Park and adjacent to an existing tree-lined pedestrian path with open space on both sides.
- ✂ South of Purcell Park to near Stone Spring Road, Blacks Run passes through remnant agricultural land, grassy and very open with some large trees. Some new construction is encroaching on this open space.
- ✂ From approximately Mosby Road and the city shops all the way south until it passes under Interstate 81, Blacks Run passes through intermittent areas of remnant agricultural land. Some areas are currently being farmed, and other areas are already

densely developed. This segment of the stream includes some broad grassy areas and stands of mature trees along the banks. This segment of Blacks Run is undergoing rapid development and may change significantly in the near future.

- ✂ South of Interstate 81 and into Rockingham County, Blacks Run passes through a variety of active agricultural landscapes.
- ✂ Along Seibert's Creek from Purcell Park toward Country Club Road, the proposed Greenway corridor passes through the James Madison University Campus.
- ✂ Newman Lake, an artificial lake on the JMU campus, provides an attractive, park-like setting in the midst of academic buildings and student housing.
- ✂ Segments of Seibert's Creek through the JMU campus flow near existing campus landscaping and off-street walkways.
- ✂ On the outer edges of the JMU campus south of Paul Street, Seibert's Creek passes through a small wooded area with mature trees.

Historic Resources

History is ever unfolding, and so in compiling and listing the historic resources that the Blacks Run Greenway will enhance, it makes most sense to identify those categories of history and culture which stand to be most highly affected by the Greenway. There are three categories: the historic sites the Greenway will be adjacent or near to, the newly formed Arts and Cultural District the Greenway will be centrally located in, and the various downtown attractions to which the Greenway will provide a common thread.

1. Historic Sites

Set in the center of the historic Shenandoah Valley, Harrisonburg is an historic site in own right, with taproots extending directly from events as disparate as the Civil War to the founding of peace-centered institutions of higher education, from the birth of large-scale poultry farming to the establishment of one of the most vibrant refugee resettlement areas in the United States. But those taproots are part of a larger context, well represented in Harrisonburg's close proximity to many cultural and geographic features with vital roles in the development of our national identity. The Blacks Run flows past much of Harrisonburg's historic grounds, and the proposed Blacks Run Greenway sits close to those same historic and cultural resources, particularly in downtown Harrisonburg. Indeed, it was water, in the form of a plentiful spring known as "the Big Spring,"

which defined the location of the current downtown Harrisonburg. The Big Spring is one of several springs providing water for the Run.

What follows is a partial listing of historic buildings that will be directly adjacent, or in close proximity, to the proposed Blacks Run Greenway:

- ☒ Asbury United Methodist Church
- ☒ Elks Lodge
- ☒ First Presbyterian Church
- ☒ Glen's Fair Price Store
- ☒ Grattan Building
- ☒ Hardesty-Higgins House
- ☒ Harrisonburg Municipal Building
- ☒ Harrisonburg School Board Building
- ☒ Joshua Wilton House
- ☒ Post Office and Federal Courthouse Building
- ☒ Rockingham County Courthouse and Court Square
- ☒ Simms Community Center (former school for African-Americans).
- ☒ Spring House (a replica of an historic spring house that stood until about 1900 at the Big Spring on Court Square in downtown Harrisonburg. The replica springhouse was constructed in the mid-1990s near the site of the original springhouse.)
- ☒ St. Stevens United Church of Christ
- ☒ Thomas Harrison House

Arts and Cultural District

To recognize and enhance its vibrant arts and cultural venues, Harrisonburg recently established an Arts and Cultural District, bounded on the north by Washington Street, on the west by High Street, on the east by Mason Street and on the south by James Madison University. Blacks Run flows directly through the center of the District, and nearly all of the sites are within one block of the proposed Blacks Run Greenway preferred route. Existing venues in this district include:

- ☒ 150 Franklin Street Gallery
- ☒ Center for American Places
- ☒ Court Square Theater
- ☒ Dance & Co.
- ☒ Mitten Gallery
- ☒ Oasis Gallery

- ☞ The Artful Dodger (a coffeehouse, often the site of poetry readings and music by local artists)
- ☞ The Little Grill (a restaurant, often the site of poetry readings and music by local artists)
- ☞ Valley Play House
- ☞ Virginia Quilt Museum

Downtown Attractions

As has been the case with many municipalities in the last three decades, downtown Harrisonburg has struggled to maintain a vital position in the retail and business sectors of city life. Although the downtown area retains its strong municipal and cultural presence, fast growth in housing and retail centers in other parts of the city has drained the downtown of much of its clout. In the last ten years, downtown revitalization has become more clearly identified as a city priority, and many improvements have taken place. Some of these improvements can only be listed as downtown attractions—sites which are unique to the downtown area, and which lend a flavor and character to Harrisonburg as a whole.

- ☞ Blacks Run Park (also known as the Water Street Pocket Park), which is directly adjacent to Blacks Run
- ☞ Court Square Theater
- ☞ Downtown Farmer's Market, also directly adjacent to Blacks Run
- ☞ Friday Nights on the Square
- ☞ Massanutten Regional Library