

**CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA**



Agenda Date:	November 4, 2024
Action Required:	Approval of the 2024 Parks & Recreation Pollocks Branch Trail Bridge Accessibility Enhancements Project and the appropriation of associated CDBG funds in the amount of \$55,527.91
Presenter:	Brenda Kelley, Redevelopment Manager, Chris Gensic, Park and Trail Planner
Staff Contacts:	Anthony Warn, Grants Analyst
Title:	Public Hearing and Resolution for the 2024 Parks & Recreation Pollocks Branch Trail Bridge Accessibility Enhancements Project, a Minor Amendment to the Program Year 2024-25 Annual Action Plan, in the amount of \$55,527.91 (CDBG) (1 of 2 readings)

Background

The City of Charlottesville is an Entitlement Community (EC) as designated by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) and, as such, is the recipient of annual allocations of federal funds through the Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) program. These funds are provided to the city by HUD to support the city's ongoing community development and affordable housing activities. This proposal seeks to continue the city's history of using CDBG funds for meaningful and high impact community development activities by supporting the development of an accessible trail bridge in the Ridge Street/South First Street neighborhood.

Discussion

The Pollocks Branch of Moores Creek runs north-to-south through the city from its start north of the Downtown Mall and passes through the North Downtown, the Belmont and Ridge Street neighborhoods as it runs south to the Rivanna River. For much of this distance the waterway runs below ground as part of the city's stormwater drainage. But starting at Elliot Avenue, the waterway 'daylights' and serves as a barrier that divides residents of the Ridge Street and South First Street neighborhoods, leaving residents with no accessible pedestrian crossing point between Rougemont and Elliott Avenues.

To cross the creek, residents have for years utilized a makeshift 'rock hop' built by moving various sized rocks and boulders into a row.

Needless to say, while this 'rock hop' pathway has been used for many years, it in no way could be considered safe and/or accessible, especially during rainy weather when the water in the creek can run high.

Building the Walkable Watershed

Conceived as part of the larger Pollocks Branch Walkable Watershed Concept Plan first approved by Council in 2016, Council then approved initial funding for the planning and development of a new pedestrian trail bridge across Pollocks Branch by resolution on September 5, 2017, in the amount of \$250,000. In July of 2019, the City's PLACE Design Taskforce also reviewed and approved the trail bridge project.

This new Pollocks Branch Trail Bridge will provide residents and visitors new safe, stable and accessible pedestrian connectivity to the creek and the emerging Rivanna Trails network, crossing the water at the end of Rockland Avenue and leading directly into CRHA's South First Street residential community.

The walkable watershed concept links the ideas of clean water, healthy communities, and connected, vibrant neighborhood places in an effort to improve urban creeks, preserve community assets, and generate community pride. When completed, the Pollocks Branch Trail Bridge will become part of the ever-expanding Pollocks Branch trail network and will provide an important link to the city's trails system. Building this bridge over the Pollocks Branch waterway will create a much needed, centrally located east-west bicycle and pedestrian link within the six-block long urban area separated by the waterway between Elliot Avenue and Rougemont Avenue.

In addition, this neighborhood is expected to experience a significant growth in population with the redevelopment of the Charlottesville Redevelopment and Housing Authority's (CRHA) nearby South First Street residential complex.

This trail and the bridge will also provide new and safe access to the developing Pollocks Branch greenway to Jordan Park. This greenway is planned to connect the downtown area with Moores Creek and the Rivanna Trails system. The bridge will traverse the Pollocks Branch waterway at the end of Rockland Avenue connecting to the Pollocks Branch Trail that traverses the eastern boundary of the CRHA South First Street community. CRHA and the City have approved easements for the trail and bridge.

Anticipated Benefits

Residents living in the South First Street community have been walking across this waterway for years in order to access stores and to visit the adjacent neighborhood. The bridge will not only create connectivity between neighborhoods and retail opportunities and enhance safe trail access, it will also make this waterway crossing safe for residents, many of whom are children, as the current crossing requires a precarious rock hop that can be slippery and hazardous, particularly after a rainstorm.

Intended Beneficiaries

While this new bridge is anticipated to bring benefits to residents of and visitors to Charlottesville alike, the primary immediate beneficiaries will be the residents of the South First Street community managed by CRHA by creating a safe route across the waterway to the adjacent neighborhood. Many of the intended beneficiaries will include new residents to the area who will be living in the South First Street residential complex currently under re-development, the population of which is expected to grow significantly upon completion of Phase 2.

Current Proposal

In support of the development of this new bridge, funding has been sought from a variety of sources,

resulting in new funding to the city of \$307,639 in new state sources, with applications for additional funding currently under consideration by private foundations. In part related to cost increases for materials and construction, a moderate funding gap is anticipated that can be filled by reprogramming certain unspent CDBG funds from prior years to support construction of the bridge. The funds to be reprogrammed here constitute a portion of the balance of unused activities that have been completed and accrued program income, and, therefore, no current Council-approved activities will be impacted by approval of this proposal.

Alignment with City Council's Vision and Strategic Plan

The work of this proposal is closely aligned to City Council's vision of the City of Charlottesville as a community in which everyone can thrive, stemming in part from its contributions to enhancing public access to **Recreation** and the city's abundant greenspaces.

Community Engagement

This proposal benefits from a high degree of community engagement in that numerous community groups and organizations have been involved in the planning of the Walkable Watershed concept since as early as 2015. The Redevelopment Committee of the Charlottesville Redevelopment and Housing Authority (CRHA) and the Charlottesville Public Housing Association of Residents (PHAR) envisioned this bridge as part of the redevelopment of South First Street.

Budgetary Impact

As the funds proposed here are federal funds allocated to the City by HUD to support community-benefit activities, and, as such, do not draw from the city's General Fund, no adverse impacts to the City's budget are anticipated. Rather, use of these funds as recommended here will instead serve to address an important and pressing community need(s) while at the same time supporting the city's eligibility for allocations of entitlement funds in future years.

The funding provided by this proposal will supplement Council's previous 2017 appropriation and more than \$307,000 in new grant funding provided by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to support construction.

Recommendation

Based on the anticipated benefits of the current proposal to the Charlottesville community, staff recommends that Council approve the proposed use of CDBG funds as presented here. Staff further recommends Council approve the associated appropriation of funds within the CDBG Fund as needed to fully implement the proposed program and related enhancements.

Suggested motion: "I move that Council approve the RESOLUTION approving the 2024 Parks & Recreation Pollocks Branch Trail Bridge Accessibility Enhancements Project and appropriate associated CDBG funds to support the implementation of this project."

Alternatives

Given that these funds are provided by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development to the City of Charlottesville for the execution of meaningful community-benefit programs and, as such, are

not drawn from the city's General Fund, no alternatives courses of action are considered. Council, could, of course, decide not to provide approval for this proposal and could instead direct staff to explore other options for expending these funds.

Attachments

1. Resolution_CDBG PY24+ Pollocks Branch Accessibility \$55,527
2. CDBG PY24+ Pollocks Branch Accessibility Slide Deck