

Editorial

Preserving something beautiful — Ararat River Greenway will be a lasting monument

“The Ararat River flows through the quaint downtown of Mount Airy in Surry County North Carolina.”

Those are the opening lines from a January 2007 consultant’s study — a master plan of how to develop the Ararat River Greenway. The study goes on to say that 97 percent of public comments from two town meetings in September 2006 favored a greenway along the 2.5 mile riverfront, connecting the Riverside Park, the Rowe Environmental Center and Tharrington Middle School Park.

On Thursday night, the Mount Airy board of commissioners voted to apply for a \$500,000 grant, which will help pay for the improvements of walking and nature trails and other items such as plans to restore the banks along the Ararat River.

“This river is eroding at about 15 feet per year,” City Parks and Recreation Director Catrina Alexander said recently. “Part of this project is going to replace a major watershed that we have in this community.”

Other projects included in the greenway plan include such items as an outdoor educational pavilion, a fishing area, a canoe takeout point, additional parking space, vehicle gates and nature trails to teach children about the environment.

The city has already earmarked \$200,000 a year for five years for streambank restoration. Mount Airy received \$1.8 million in grants from the N.C. Clean Water Management Trust Fund for the river greenway, specifically a 3.2-mile stretch of the Ararat along Riverside Park.

The biggest obstacle to developing the greenway, the consultants said in their study, was acquiring all the necessary and coordinating greenway trail development underneath three bridges.

City Manager Don Brookshire said recently that officials are “currently acquiring all of the property that will be necessary for this project.”

Beyond simply restoring a magnificent natural resource, development of the greenway will have significant implications for other walks of life including economic development and tourism. All one has to do to see evidence of this is to visit the Yadkin River Greenway that links North Wilkesboro, Wilkesboro and Wilkes County. There, local government officials and nonprofit organizations have collaborated to provide a wonderful site for all ages. The greenway, using bicycle and pedestrian trails, links visitors to such well-known landmarks as the historic Overmountain Victory Trail and plenty of ecological gems along the Yadkin River.

To us and those who follow in our footsteps, the Ararat River Greenway project will be seen as a lasting monument to a precious natural resource. By moving forward, city officials are preserving something beautiful that we can all learn from now and in future generations.
