

REGION

'WE'RE LIVING UP TO MAINTAINING THE TRAIL ALREADY'

'NOW, WE OWN IT'



EMILY BALL, BRISTOL HERALD COURIER FILE

In this photo taken in August, visitors enjoy a warm summer day as they walk along the Mendota Trail, a 12.5-mile-long hiking and biking path. Washington County officials celebrated the recent acquisition of the Mendota Trail during Tuesday's Board of Supervisors meeting in Abingdon, Virginia.

Board celebrates acquisition of Mendota Trail

JOE TENNIS
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Washington County officials celebrated the recent acquisition of the Mendota Trail during Tuesday's Board of Supervisors meeting in Abingdon, Virginia.

"We're having a lot of fun," said Washington County Administrator Jason Berry. "It's consuming a lot of time. But we're having a lot of fun."

It recently took two days for employees working for Kevin Hill, the county's director of general services, to mow the entire length of the 12.5-mile-long trail that spans from Bristol's Island Road to Mendota's Mendota Road, Berry said.

"We're living up to maintaining the trail already," said Berry. "Now, we own it. So if we make a mistake, we'll fix it. But the county has never owned a trail nor maintained a trail. So we're leaning as we go."

On Friday, Sept. 15, at 11 a.m., the trail officially opens its entire 12.5-mile length with a ceremony at the Benhams parking area.

"Friday will be the final official opening," said Board of Supervisors Chairman Saul Hernandez.



BHC FILE PHOTO

The Mendota Trail head on Island Road in Washington County, Virginia.

The celebration is being held near the old Benhams Mall, Hernandez said. "The hope is to open that back up and sell some food and maybe rent some bikes."

The trail has had significant traffic in the Mendota area, according to Hernandez.

"I know there's been a lot of traffic on the Mendota side," he said.

Still, Vice Chairman Mike Rush questioned how the county could maintain the network of volunteers associated with the non-profit Mendota Trail Conservancy.

"They've got something we don't have, which is volunteers,"

Rush said. "And there's probably some role they can assume as we maintain that trail. And I would hate to lose that institutional knowledge that they have."

Hernandez said a memorandum of understanding has been in the works for the Mendota Trail Conservancy to continue working with the trail, even as it is now operated by the county.

Rush, in particular, hopes to make the Mendota Trail part of a potential State park with a plan that includes acquiring land near the 100-foot-tall Abrams Falls.

Recently, the Washington County Circuit Court issued an order following a partition suit,

Berry said.

"The falls has been officially dealt with by the courts," Berry said. "We're waiting for that to transpire. But I guess there's a potential that once that happens, it will be gifted to the county for fee-simple ownership."

The falls is located about a mile from the existing trail.

"It is my understanding that there were many heirs on that property going back a century. And it gets into what's referred to as unclaimed property in Richmond, Virginia," County Attorney Brandon Snodgrass said.

Rush said the falls, along with the nearby trail, could be lobbied as a package for Washington County to gain a state park.

In other business, the board approved rezoning a 24-acre site on Watauga Road for the Stewart family, switching it from residential to agricultural. The land is slated to be used for a cattle operation, said Zoning Administrator Stephen Richardson.

Also, the board approved appointing Kevin Thayer to serve on the Washington County Service Authority Board of Directors and Lisa Wilson to serve on the Washington County Park Authority.

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