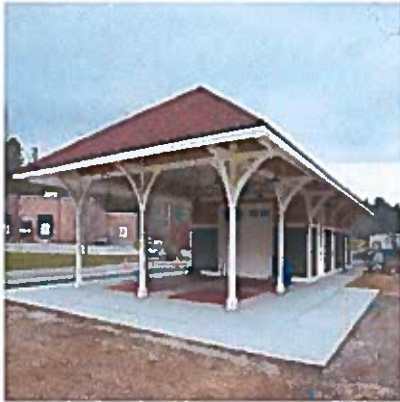# The Transylvania Times -

City's Depot Park Nearing Completion- Brevard NC

By Matt McGregor
Staff Writer

The Depot Railroad Avenue Park is nearing completion and will arrive at its terminal on May 23, when the City of Brevard is scheduled to hold a dedication ceremony during the White Squirrel Festival.

During the festival, the Depot Railroad Avenue Park will also be the site of Rotary Club of Brevard White Squirrel 5K and Fun Run, where it will start and finish.

The cost of the depot building itself is $533,888. The proposed budget for its construction was set at $530,000 when it was approved 4-1 by the Brevard City Council in September of 2018.

The city raised $62,000 in brick sales and received $92,000 from sponsors, totaling $154,000), and with $380,000 from the city's General Fund. The Rotary Club was the largest donor at $20,000.

Sponsors that contributed $15,000 each included Dominion Energy (Formerly PSNC), Transylvania County Tourism and an anonymous donor. Comporium donated $10,000.

All other sponsors combined donations totaled $37,000.

City Manager Jim Fatland said the revenue from fundraising went into the depot building, not into the expenditures for the park itself.

Other costs for the Depot Railroad Avenue Park totaled $484,051, which included site preparation, stormwater, paved trail and parking lot, curb and gutter, engraved bricks, civil engineer, architectural fees and construction management.

Councilman Mac Morrow said that before the city was considering building a depot, there were plans for a park and parking lot in the spot of the depot dating back to 2008.

Fatland said the city in 2017 purchased land from Comporium for $75,000 to extend the city's multi-use path that ends at McLean Street.

"This acquired land was a natural fit for the new depot building and creation of a park with public restrooms," Fatland said.

In previous reports, Fatland had stated that the Railroad Depot building is a part of the city-wide master plan for an interconnected trail system that, when completed, would connect Hap Simpson Park on U.S. 276 to Davidson River Campground in Pisgah National Forest, and pass through the city and county's Sport's Complex, the proposed dog park, the depot, the Mary C. Jenkins Community Center, Tannery Park, Silversteen Park, Brevard High School and the Boys & Girls Club of Transylvania County, to name a few of existing and future adjacent amenities.

In August 2018, City Council approved a resolution to complete the trail system within three years.

Fatland reported that the city received a $180,000 PARTF Grant from NC Parks for easements and land acquisition to construct the city's trail system.

Fatland said the Depot Railroad Avenue Park project really began for him when the city was in discussions with N.C. Department of Trans-portation (DOT) on the proposed West Loop Project in 2016.

The West Loop project would realign the Asheville Highway to Rosman Highway and would include a sidewalk and bicycle lanes.

The proposed West Loop Road would have connected Railroad Avenue with Osborne and Cashiers Valley roads with a new section of road, but would also use already existing roads in the area, including Railroad Avenue, Cashiers Valley Road and Nicholson Creek Road.

The project aimed at facilitating a move in local traffic from Asheville Highway onto a separate bypass.

A part of the project was to widen the vehicle bridge on Railroad Avenue. It called for a much wider bridge, with two bike lanes and two sidewalks.

"Feedback from the citizens was, if we build this bridge for the future West Loop project, which is not funded and still not funded today, you'd have two lanes of traffic, two bike lanes and two sidewalks going nowhere," Fatland said. "My thought was, let's reduce the width of the bridge from 54 feet to 33 feet and do a separate trail from McLean Street along Railroad Avenue to Probart Street."

With the reduced right-of-way needed for the bridge, Fatland said cooperation from Railroad Avenue property owners to support the trail extension became a lot easier.

At the time, the city had a contract with DOT for the construction of the bridge at $1,040,000, with the city paying 20 percent, or $208,000.

However, Fatland said, the construction estimate increased to $1,500,000.

"If we had proceeded with the project, it would have been $668,000 out of the city's pocket, not $208,000," Fatland said. "By reducing the Railroad Avenue Bridge from 54 feet to 33 feet and constructing a separate trail, we saved the city $460,000. This savings was instead applied toward the development of the Depot Railroad Avenue Park."

Morrow said the 2014 Railroad Avenue Community plan, a strategic plan for the area based on public input, identifies community needs for the area in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure along Railroad Avenue from McLean to Main streets, a festival infrastructure, a parking lot and a public park.

"Remember, this is a site that has public housing, which is some of the most underserved population in town," Morrow said. "They deserve to have a place to have their birthday parties and to meet one another."

Public input from the area plan, he said, calls for a "stronger neighborhood identity and a sense of community."

"What this project does is brand that area with its railroad heritage as a commercial center," he said. "When the railroad came, it transformed the economy of this county. Long-term residents have expressed concern that the history of the neighborhood is being lost. We are just following the same plan that was developed in 2014."

Both Morrow and Fatland said the park has been "the biggest challenge (the city's) had in the last 10 years."

"It's huge when you think about it," Morrow said. "For everybody but a handful, the Railroad Depot project is a natural."

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