

Greenway to Follow Blacks Run Through Harrisonburg

By Jeremy Good
Co-Editor in Chief

The dream of a greenway for recreation and environmental preservation in Harrisonburg will likely see fruition. In the roughly 30 years since the idea first surfaced there have been various false starts and setbacks.

A greenway, or linear park, is a corridor of undeveloped land intended for recreational use. Harrisonburg's proposed greenway follows Blacks Run, a six-mile creek that runs north-to-south, primarily within city limits. The creek is polluted by urban runoff, including that of the EMU campus and has a high fecal coliform count. Blacks Run is part of the system of tributaries that eventually empties into the Chesapeake Bay.

Concerned citizens have organized an annual Blacks Run cleanup day since the first Earth Day in 1970. These efforts also spawned a small park downtown near the Shenandoah Bicycle Company on Main St. This year, the cleanup day is slated for Sat., Apr. 21.

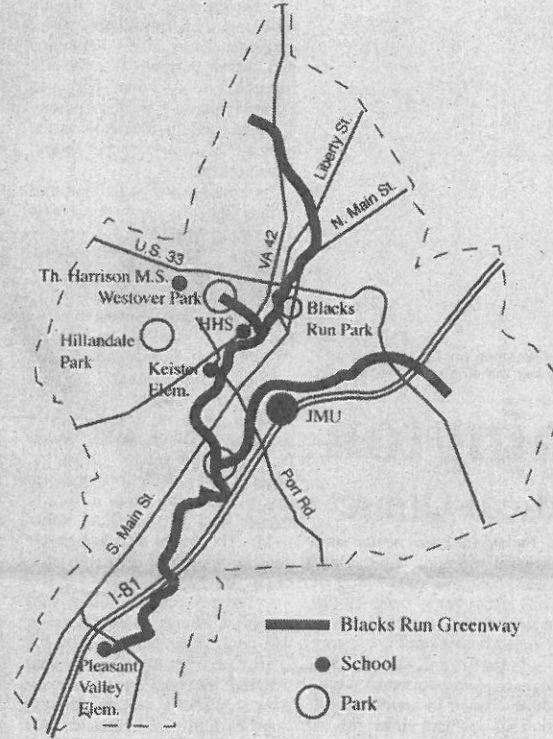
In addition to providing an attractive place to walk or bike for pleasure, the greenway would allow for safer non-automobile transportation. Going downtown on a bike from EMU would no longer require braving Rt. 42, where traffic often travels in excess of the posted 35-MPH speed limit. The planned north-south route would span the city nearly tip-to-tip with an eastern branch along Seibert Creek adding access to JMU and terminating near Valley Mall.

Creating the greenway gives an opportunity to address environmental concerns along the Blacks Run corridor. One planned measure is erosion prevention.

The Blacks Run Greenway Partnership (BRGP), created in late 2000, is a public-private group that is planning the project. Scott Jost, chair of the Art Department, co-chairs the BRGP with Stacy Turner, director of Planning and Community Development for Harrisonburg City.

Jost's involvement grew out of an art project that focused on Blacks Run. In the process of interviewing people and taking photos for his project, Jost discovered that, while various people had interest in cleaning up Blacks Run, their methods sometimes clashed.

"Volunteers would plant trees and the City would cut them down," said Jost as an example of how different groups



Courtesy Blacks Run Greenway Partnership

The above diagram shows the route of the proposed greenway that will follow Blacks Run Creek. The project is being steered by the Blacks Run Greenway Partnership (BRGP), a public-private group. The creation of the greenway will bring the environmental concerns about the creek's urban-runoff pollution to public attention.

envisioned the creek banks being improved. Some advocated for a manicured appearance while others preferred a more natural look.

BRGP is currently performing a corridor analysis, which is a preliminary step in determining

the viability of the project. The next step is the creation of a master plan which Jost estimates will be completed by the end of May. From the master plan specific plans for site construction will be created.

In the works for this year is a "pocket" park, funded in part by a \$10,000 grant from Cargill Corporation.

Grants are the primary mode of fundraising for the project, which includes a matching program from the City. Through

this arrangement the City matches funds raised and volunteer time given by BRGP dollar for dollar. In addition, the Virginia Dept. of Forestry provided \$11,500 for the planning stage.

One of the most serious challenges facing the greenway is obtaining cooperation from landowners. Where land is owned privately, the Partnership will ask for voluntary easements. The arrangement allows public use of the land while releasing the owner from liability for the publicly used portion. The Partnership cannot exert legal power to obtain land, making good relations with landowners critical. One uncooperative owner could potentially drastically affect the project by making the greenway discontinuous.

Despite these potential snags, Jost is optimistic, saying, "I really think that there's a good bit of community support for the project."

In a public meeting, to be held on Mar. 11, BRGP hopes to win the support of landowners along the six segments of the proposed greenway.

BLACKBOARD from pg. 1

and address; they just go into Blackboard and click next to their name and they can send e-mail to those students."

Assistant Professor of Economics Debra Stevens had been using the free service Delphiforums.com to coordinate her classes at EMU and James Madison University (JMU) well before EMU began using Blackboard, but said she plans to switch to the new system because her new textbook is tailored for it, incorporating answers to study guide questions, current events links and online updates.

Although Professor of Physical Education Lester Zook has not yet used Blackboard in his classes, he has found an application for the system in the area of backpacking and rock climbing. Using Blackboard, Zook set up an online calendar of usage for a particular section of George Washington National Forest so that EMU, JMU, the University of Virginia and a collection of local camps and independent climbing guides can coordinate when they visit. Blackboard has, says Zook, "given us a way of communicating together so we're not running into each other out there in the field."

Some professors just don't feel the need to take classes online.

"I didn't feel it was of particular use to me," said Professor of Physics John Horst, citing the small size of many of his classes and the time required to set up the system as reasons he hasn't used Blackboard yet. "I just sort of figure students should come to class."

"There's no need for everyone to feel like they need to use it," said Zollinhofer. "The idea is that if it is usable and makes sense, then hopefully it will be a welcome tool. If some people don't find it useful, then we shouldn't push them to use it. But we do think that there are some really nice things about it that can really allow the regular teaching practices to be more effective."

Student reactions to Blackboard are mixed. Some, like sophomore Jacob Mumbauer, haven't needed to use it at all. Says Mumbauer, "I can't remember my password."

Freshman Benjamin Myers pointed out that Blackboard is only convenient for students who have

easy access to the Internet: "I don't have the connection to Blackboard in my room. So I have to run up to the computer lab to check my assignments. It's a pain in the butt."

Most students see the system as a mixed blessing. "All the information is there, you can just access it from your room without having to call your professor," said sophomore Marcus Harris. "The downside is there's no excuse for not having your work sometimes."

"I don't like that my teachers don't respond to my articles," said junior Andrea Kuhns. "I do like that you can read what your classmates have to say."

Sophomore Eric Kroeker was most cynical. "The biggest problem with Blackboard is there's no more relationship between the professors and students because it's all on the computer," he said. "Blackboard is just a tool professors use so they don't have to teach."

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SIFE is declaring next week ResponsibleUse of Credit Week here at EMU!

SIFE will be sponsoring two seminars next week that will help you plan for your financial future! If you are interested in learning how to manage your finances and learn more about SIFE, please feel free to come to the Science Center Room 106 on Monday, February 11th and Wednesday, February 13th!

Monday, February 11th
6:30-8:00 p.m.
Science Center Room 106
Ron Stoltz will talk about issues involving credit cards and how to establish a solid credit history.
Spencer Cowles will discuss the credentials you need to obtain loans from a bank.

Wednesday, February 13th
6:30-8:00 p.m.
Science Center Room 106
Travis Trotter will concentrate on student loans and what you can do to deal with this debt after graduation.