

Top Ten Public Comments

Explore Park Master Plan - Community Meetings (Sep.-Oct. 2015)



During the first round of public input, consultants and staff spoke with approximately **230** meeting attendees including both citizens and interested stakeholders. The categories below demonstrate the top 10 most frequently recorded comments from these meetings - ranked in order of popularity.

1) Trails and Connectivity - Participants were interested in the continued development of trails at Explore Park. They wanted to see various levels of difficulty, from paved walking paths for seniors or individuals with disabilities, to mixed use dirt paths with better directional markers. Suggestions were given for multi-use paths including walking, biking and equestrian. Regional connectivity was another often heard theme, including the extension of the Roanoke River Greenway to the park, alternative ways to access the park from downtown Roanoke, and water connections to Smith Mountain Lake. Within the park, participants wanted to see more connectivity to the Bedford County side of the property, whether through recreational use or a bridge connecting the two sides of the river.

2) Overnight Accommodations - Our second most heard topic was the need for overnight accommodations at the park. Solutions suggested included primitive or tent camping, rental cabins, RV parking with associated amenities and a lodge or hotel.

3) Water Access - Roanoke River frontage at the park was recognized as a valuable asset. Participants wanted to preserve the natural beauty of this area while allowing access for fishing, canoeing, tubing and kayaking. More specific ideas included creating an in-river kayak course, creating a delayed-harvest trout fishery, and improving the put-in/take-out points for boating.

4) Recreation Programs & Education - Participants saw the need for a variety of outdoor programs, especially those dealing with nature education and family recreation. Suggestions included a wide range of guided instructional activities led by Parks, Recreation and Tourism, as well as partnerships with schools and area cultural institutions.

5) Events & Venue Infrastructure - There were many suggestions for reoccurring special events at the park. These ranged from concert series and wine festivals to competitive races. The need was voiced for improved event infrastructure such as an amphitheater.

6) Nature Preservation - Our community places a high value on retaining the natural beauty of the landscape at Explore Park. They were cautious of over-development, yet mindful of opportunities for the public to better experience nature through overlooks, maintenance and overall park design.

7) Shopping & Dining - Many suggestions were made regarding commercial opportunities at the park. Often heard suggestions were a restaurant or brewery at the site. Others wanted to see areas to shop for crafts or be able to purchase or rent outdoor recreation equipment.

8) Adventure Sports - Participants saw the opportunity for adventure-based outdoor recreation to play a large role in the park. This includes activities such as a high-ropes course/zip-line, mountain bike competitions, rock climbing, and shooting sports.

9) Cultural Heritage - A wide variety of comments were received regarding cultural heritage at the park. Many suggestions included the re-purposing of historical buildings on the site for other activities, while preserving history through kiosks or interactive exhibits. Other suggestions included the preservation of our region's art and music legacy at the park.

10) Destination Attraction - A final theme voiced at the meetings involved creating a quality attraction to bring in tourists from outside our area. This should be a unique feature worthy of repeated visits to the park. Participants were mindful of the need to balance local resident use versus tourist use through a well-balanced mix of recreation amenities.



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www.ExplorePark.org