

Gordonsville Town to Trail park group gets \$100,000 grant

Supports connection of Verling Park to GVFC fairgrounds

The Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC) announced this week that it has received a \$100,000 grant from the Virginia Outdoors Foundation in support of its Town to Trail park connectivity initiative in Gordonsville that will improve recreation access for residents and visitors.

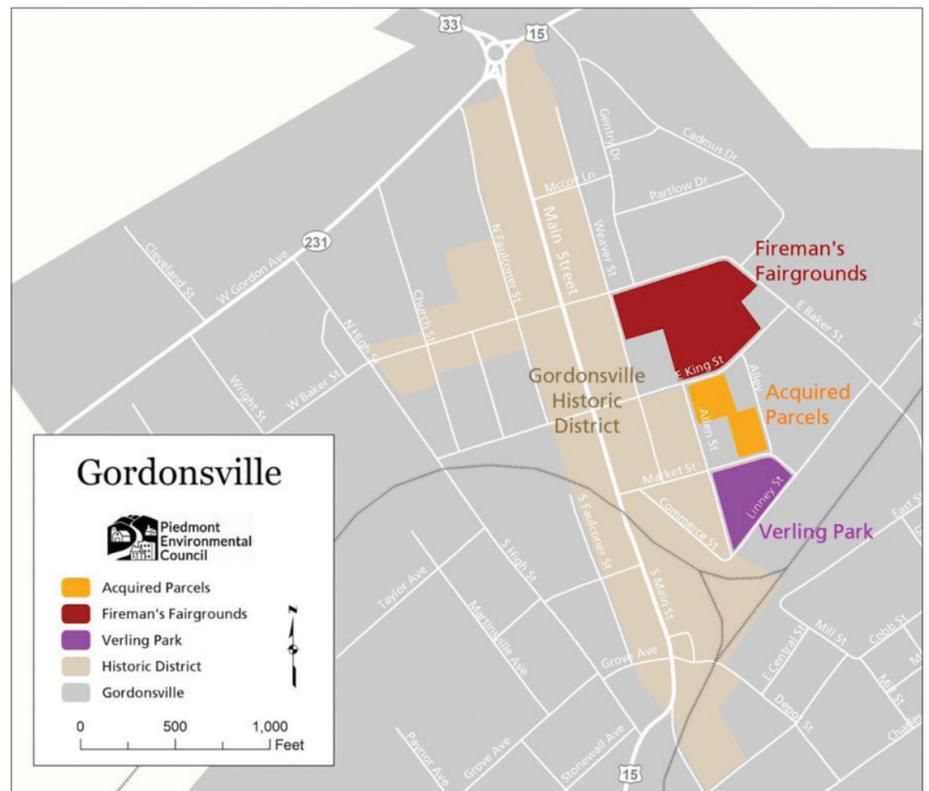
With the Gordonsville Town Council's recent approval of a resolution supporting PEC's purchase of a 0.85-acre property at 304 Market Street for Gordonsville park expansion, the grant will enable PEC to place public access easements on this and another PEC-owned property at 204 Allen Street. Together, the two lots comprise nearly two acres and will result in a contiguous, nearly 10-acre, in-town network of open spaces by connecting Gordonsville's Verling Park and Dix Memorial Pool—Orange County's only public swimming pool—to the Gordonsville Volunteer Fire Company Fireman's Fairgrounds. PEC intends to work with the Gordonsville Town Council to gift ownership of the land to Gordonsville to incorporate into the town park with easements to ensure public access to open space.

Since 2017, PEC's Town to Trail working group, a grassroots collection of friends, neighbors and local businesses who share a vision to renew local parks and develop trails, has been focused on securing private and public funding to realize a vision for a robust park network linking existing

open spaces at the heart of the Gordonsville, including an expanded and refurbished Verling Park. That vision was formed around input provided by community members during several public meetings. The meetings were organized as part of a University of Virginia School of Architecture planning charrette intended to develop potential project concepts implementing goals established in the town comprehensive plan.

"Residents told us they want to see a more functional park that serves the whole community. Parks, trails and sidewalks help weave a community together; walkable neighborhoods and towns create a strong sense of place, and that really is the vision for this effort," said Emily Winkey, Gordonsville Vice Mayor. "In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the importance of locally-placed parks and trails to community and individual health and wellness, so it is tremendously exciting to see this effort moving forward."

The Gordonsville Volunteer Fire Company will retain full ownership of the fireman's fairgrounds, which serves as essential training ground for local and regional fire companies, as well as space for such public events as the Gordonsville Fried Chicken Festival and fundraisers for the fire company. No changes to the fireman's fairgrounds will occur without close coordination and approval of the Gordonsville Volunteer Fire Company. The Town of Gordonsville will re-



MAP BY WATSUN RANDOLPH, PEC

The Piedmont Environmental Council and its Town to Trail initiative has worked to acquire two parcels in Gordonsville that will link Verling Park with the Gordonsville Volunteer Fire Company fairgrounds, creating nearly 10 acres of contiguous open space in town.

tain full ownership of Verling Park and the two properties that will be gifted to the town by PEC.

"These two organizations have a 100-year history of strong collaboration, and PEC is excited to work with both in developing a unified design that will serve the community well," said Peter Hujik, Town to Trail point-person and field representative for the Piedmont Environmental Council.

"The almost two acres acquired by community members through PEC's Town to Trail initiative builds off of the inspiring legacy of park development by members of the Gordonsville community and local organizations like the Gordonsville Volunteer Fire Company, which established the firemen's fairgrounds, and the Lions Club, which operated Dix Memorial Pool and Verling Park before giving it to the town. It's our generation's turn to chip in and update these important public open spaces."

"The momentum developing around expanding and updating public places in Gordonsville occurs only once a generation or two,"

remarked council member Liz Samra. "We have a remarkable opportunity to pull together during this difficult time, focus on improving our public spaces and emerge as a stronger and better community. Many municipalities are using these types of park development projects not only to improve the quality of life, but also as a strategy for economic development."

"Expanding the park space between the fire company fairgrounds and Verling Park will be an asset to the community, especially as we work to update Verling Park and seek additional space for regulation-size sports facilities," said Mayor Bob Coiner. "The proposed park network will make a valuable contribution to the continued flourishing of our community as Gordonsville enters its sesquicentennial year."

"The Gordonsville Volunteer Fire Company has always been a good neighbor. We have long shared the fairgrounds with the Gordonsville Little League for a ballpark and more recently with the folks behind the community garden on a contractual basis. We are

excited to be a part of this effort and work to update the fairgrounds in a way that maintains their essential functions as a training ground, fairgrounds and a fundraising venue," said Gordonsville Fire Chief Ronnie Johnson.

Town leaders, Town to Trail members and other partners know the park enhancements will all require continued fundraising, partnerships, grants and community effort.

In 2018, The Piedmont Environmental Council made a significant contribution toward the Town's purchase of a residential lot at 112 Linney Street to expand Verling Park to a full town block. In 2019 and 2020, PEC raised money from private donations to purchase the two lots connecting the fireman's fairgrounds and Verling Park. Those lots, which will be gifted to the town after the public access easements are established, along with the town's purchase of 1.197 acres of Verling Park from CSX earlier this year, will bring all of Verling Park and the recent acquisitions under town ownership.