

ROANOKE
VIRGINIA



COUNTY
EST. 1838

Joint Announcement

EXPLORE PARK LEASE AGREEMENT

THURSDAY, AUGUST 29, 2013 • 10:00 AM

Presented by:
Virginia Recreational Facilities Authority
and Roanoke County

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Kelvin C. Bratton, Chairman
Virginia Recreational Facilities Authority

REMARKS

Michael W. Altizer, Chariman
Roanoke County Board of Supervisors

QUESTIONS

Kelvin C. Bratton and Michael W. Altizer

ADJOURN



View from Blue Ridge Parkway leading to Explore Park

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Roanoke County to Establish Regional Outdoor Adventure Park
VRFA Agrees in Principle to Ninety-Nine Year Lease of Explore Park

ROANOKE COUNTY, VA (August 29, 2013) – In an announcement today at Explore Park, Virginia Recreational Facilities Authority (VRFA) Chairman Kelvin C. Bratton detailed an agreement in principle that would establish a 99-year lease of Explore Park to Roanoke County. The park would be administered by Roanoke County's Parks, Recreation and Tourism department, with the long-term goal of creating a regional adventure park.



"The VRFA's goal has been to meet the mission of Explore Park," says Bratton. "Our pending agreement with Roanoke County will preserve what we have created, and evolve the many opportunities we have cultivated throughout our 27 years in existence. This is a time for great enthusiasm and anticipation."

Explore Park would be added to the County's current inventory of recreation facilities, providing both passive and active recreation opportunities, as well as future economic development possibilities through public-private partnerships. Among the possible uses the County is considering for the park are special events, family outreach programs, pavilion rentals, RV camping, rental cabins and outdoor adventure attractions.

Roanoke County Board of Supervisors Chairman Michael W. Altizer said he believes that this partnership is the right fit at the right time for Explore Park. He spoke to the stability and unique resources that Roanoke County brings to the table, with a history of successful recreation management projects. Chairman Altizer is excited about the opportunity to better serve the recreation needs of Roanoke County citizens, while creating new economic development opportunities for the entire area.

The Roanoke County Board of Supervisors is scheduled to take up the lease agreement at board meetings on September 10 and September 24, with a public hearing on the 24th. The public is also encouraged to attend a community meeting about the proposal on Thursday, September 19 at 6:00 P.M. at the Explore Park Visitor's Center. Roanoke County officials will be on hand at this meeting to present further details and answer citizen questions.

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NEWS RELEASE

PO Box 505
Vinton, Virginia 24179

For immediate release
August 29, 2013

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
Mr. Kelvin C. Bratton 540.397.3799
Chairman Virginia Recreation Facilities Authority

Virginia Recreational Facilities Authority Approves, in Principle, Lease of Explore Park to Roanoke County

In 1985, a group of Roanoke Valley-based community and business leaders formed The River Foundation—a Virginia non-stock, non-profit corporation—to create an attraction “for the use, enjoyment, recreation, and benefit of all residents in and visitors to the Roanoke Valley” and the Blue Ridge Parkway. The vision was to create an anchor attraction that would serve as the hub for tourism in the western part of the Commonwealth, causing travelers to stop in our area, enjoy our attractions, eat in our restaurants, and sleep in our hotels.

On July 1, 1986, the Virginia General Assembly created (Chapter 16, Sec. 10.1-1600) the Virginia Recreational Facilities Authority (the “VRFA”), a political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Virginia, in order to

- (i) provide a high quality recreational attraction in the western part of the Commonwealth;
- (ii) expand the historical knowledge of adults and children;
- (iii) promote tourism and economic development in the Commonwealth;
- (iv) set aside and conserve scenic and natural areas along the Roanoke River and preserve open-space lands; and
- (v) enhance and expand research and educational programs.

For the last 27 years since 1986, the Virginia Recreational Facilities Authority, the River Foundation, the Commonwealth of Virginia, local governments, federal grants, our partners, volunteers, and donors successfully created an 1100 acre park on the Blue Ridge Parkway with 10 regional historic structures, replicated historic structures, modern facilities, extensive infrastructure to support the park, an International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) sanctioned 9 mile bike trail system, miles of hiking trails, and public access to the Roanoke River. Since 1986, \$52 million have been invested in the creation and operation of Virginia’s Explore Park for citizens of the community and tourists to our region.

The park officially opened in 1994 and for 19 years it has provided educational outings for school children each year, provided venues for weddings, events, and social gatherings, and entertained hundreds of thousands of visitors. It has provided tourist information to travelers at the Blue Ridge Parkway Visitor Center and an outdoor venue for picnics, hiking, mountain biking, fishing, nature watching and exploration. But this has not been without challenges and without government funding it has been difficult. Regular government funding and resources have not been obtainable and park operations are not sufficient to provide the revenue necessary to operate and further develop the park.

The Economic Development Consortium was appointed in 2009 to create a plan for the park's future. Stakeholders consisting of planners, economic development professionals, citizens, and recreational professionals were assembled to conduct a thorough analysis of Explore Park's options moving forward. Their recommendations presented a conceptual master plan for the Park and many options that members of the consortium and the VRFA believe will provide a path to the Park's future and a sustainable operation.

Having this extensive infrastructure in place provides the framework for future development, and the options are many; however, the VRFA needs a partner with the resources to make it a reality and Roanoke County has stepped forward. They have an interest in the future of Explore Park and utilizing this amazing resource to serve residents and tourists to our region. They have presented a proposal to the VRFA to lease Explore Park for 99 years. Under the terms of the lease Roanoke County will preserve the historic structures while they complete a master plan for the future development of the park. While they are conducting the master plan, they will continue to provide limited public access, programs, and operation of the Blue Ridge Parkway Visitor Center.

The VRFA could have moved forward on its own, but this is the right way to provide for the long term viability of Explore Park and to make this asset available to the community. Roanoke County is a capable partner and has the resources to move Explore Park to the next level and to provide stable funding for its success.

The VRFA and Roanoke County are currently working through the terms of the lease, have approved it in principle, and will hold public hearings to obtain input from stakeholders and citizens. We look forward to hearing your comments, suggestions, and ideas.

Roanoke County shares the VRFA's vision for Explore Park to be a leader in providing outdoor recreation opportunities, stewardship of our region's heritage, and environmental conservation for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of present and future generations.

The VRFA thinks that this lease with Roanoke County will begin an exciting new chapter in the life of Virginia's Explore Park. We are excited about the opportunities this provides for Virginia's Explore Park and the Roanoke Valley.

If you have questions or need additional information, please contact the Virginia Recreational Facilities Authority by e-mailing Debbie Pitts, Executive Director, depitts@b2xonline.com.

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Proposal Overview

EXPLORE PARK LEASE AGREEMENT

Roanoke County sees the value in establishing Explore Park as a regional outdoor adventure park that creates recreational opportunities in eco-tourism, as well as passive and active leisure activities. Additionally, Explore Park has economic development opportunities that will provide financial benefits to the region. Roanoke County would like to propose a 99 year lease (Lease) from the VRFA to oversee the operation and development of Explore Park. This lease would allow Roanoke County to plan for and develop the appropriate improvements necessary to provide the services as described by the Commonwealth of Virginia's enabling legislation which created the Virginia Recreational Facilities Authority in order to:

- **Provide a high quality recreation attraction in the western part of the Commonwealth**
- **Expand historical knowledge of adults and children**
- **Promote tourism and economic development in the Commonwealth**
- **Set aside and conserve scenic and natural areas along the Roanoke River and preserve open space**
- **Enhance and expand research and educational programs**

Explore Park will compliment the diverse offerings of parks and recreational opportunities that Roanoke County currently provides. In the 2007 Roanoke County Parks, Recreation and Tourism Citizen Demand Survey, Roanoke County citizens identified greenways, passive recreation and open space as the top priority for recreational needs. The Master Plan also identified that Roanoke County is short in the areas of regional park acreage and linear trails and greenways. Explore Park will help Roanoke County to achieve many of the goals it has established for its park system.

Roanoke County wants to see Explore Park develop and thrive as a regional destination. The most important aspect for the park's development is to implement a master plan of the amenities and attractions that our citizens and stakeholders wish to see at the park. Over the next 15 years as funding permits, Roanoke County will invest into Explore Park to build infrastructure, programs, public-private partnerships and create a volunteer base that will help to evolve Explore Park into a destination that outdoor enthusiasts desire. Explore Park has a potential unlike any other recreation amenity in the Roanoke Valley. Explore Park's best opportunity for survival and development is to be a part of Roanoke County's park system to be provided the resources it needs to flourish.

Roanoke County brings the following assets to Explore Park that will ensure its future preservation:

Stability

Roanoke County has a long history of providing services to citizens in a timely and quality manner. Through the leadership of the Board of Supervisors, an organizational structure has been put into place that identifies staff roles and responsibilities for services that can easily be implemented into the operation of Explore Park.

Resources

Roanoke County has a very knowledgeable and tenured staff that can address the needs of Explore Park, as well as relationships with many regional organizations that can leverage their knowledge and abilities to assist the park in a long term plan. Roanoke County has resources in planning, construction, engineering, financial management, maintenance, economic development, marketing, grants and technology that can aid in the future development of the park.

Long term financial investment

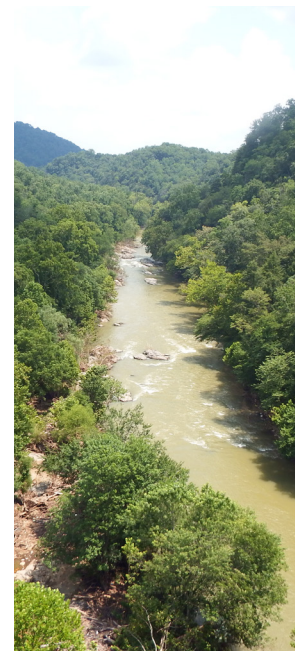
Roanoke County has the financial ability to support park operations for future years, just as it does now for its existing parks. Through annual appropriations, in kind support, as well as capital resources, Roanoke County is best positioned to absorb Explore Park into its park system.

Recreation management

Roanoke County has a very diverse park system that already includes many of Explore Park's characteristics. Roanoke County has a proven track record for park management and maintenance. It also has the ability to develop revenue options to offset operational and maintenance costs through programming, special events and partnerships.

Economic development

Roanoke County has a proven Economic Development Department that can support the future private development of the park through expert analysis, marketing and promotion of the park to potential business prospects.





IMPORTANT DATES

EXPLORE PARK LEASE AGREEMENT

ROANOKE COUNTY BOARD MEETING

Tuesday, September 10, 2013

The board will take up the Explore Park lease proposal at these this regular meeting.
Roanoke County Administration Building

COMMUNITY MEETING

Thursday, September 19, 2013

The public is encouraged to attend a community meeting about the proposed Explore Park lease agreement. Staff and officials will be on hand to answer questions.
6:00 P.M. at the Explore Park Visitor's Center

ROANOKE COUNTY BOARD MEETING

Tuesday, September 24, 2013

The board will take have a public hearing and final reading to discuss the lease agreement.
Roanoke County Administration Building

*Thanks for attending this exciting joint announcement!
We look forward to enhancing our recreation offerings
through this potential addition to our parks system.*

Doug Blount

Director of Parks, Recreation and Tourism for Roanoke County
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