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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**City presents preliminary plans for walking trail extension in the River District**

The city of Danville on Thursday presented preliminary plans for connecting the Riverwalk Trail from the north bank of the Dan River to the Main Street Plaza under construction on the river's south bank. A pedestrian and bicycle lane across the northbound Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Bridge would connect the two.

The Riverwalk on the Dan is an 8.5-mile, paved trail for pedestrians and bicyclists, with routes on the north and south banks of the river. The plans presented Thursday would provide a second connection of those routes, which currently are linked only at the Crossing at the Dan on Craghead Street.

"We always have envisioned a second connection," said Ken Gillie, division director of planning for the city's Department of Community Development. "This connection will tie directly into downtown."

Tim Wagner, project manager with the consulting firm Wiley/Wilson, called the second connection a great asset.

"It will be a great asset because it allows pedestrians and bicyclists to move from one side of the Dan River to the other in a much safer manner than they can currently do so," Wagner said.

To create the pedestrian and bicycle lane, the existing sidewalk on the downstream side of the bridge would be widened from five feet to 10 feet. The width of the three travel lanes for motor vehicles would be reduced to accommodate the wider sidewalk. On the north end of the bridge, the number of lanes would be reduced from four to three, with one instead of the current two lanes directing traffic straight ahead to North Main Street.

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A safety barrier would separate the pedestrian and bicycle lane from vehicular traffic.

Bill Davidge, vice president of Wiley/Wilson, said, the bridge's historical significance is a factor in the barrier design. "We want to blend with the current bridge railings," Davidge said.

Serviceability is another key factor. "The barrier would meet crash test standards to steer traffic away from pedestrians and back into the travel lanes," Davidge said. "We also want to accommodate not only walkers but bicyclists by installing rub rails at the center of gravity height to protect a bicyclist from falling over into traffic."

A barrier also would be placed on top of the existing bridge railing for added protection.

At the bridge's north end, the sidewalk would be widened to 10 feet and use a pattern of brick pavers and banding similar to the Main Street Plaza. The wider sidewalk would extend along River Street to a city-owned easement near Abercrombie Oil, and then follow the easement to the existing Riverwalk Trail. Trees would be planted adjacent the sidewalk along River Street and the easement.

At the bridge's south end, the existing sidewalk at the former Dan River Research Building would be widened and use a pattern of brick pavers. A pedestrian signal would be installed at Patton and Bridge streets to allow walkers and bicyclists to cross to the Main Street Plaza.

"We recognize there is a lot going on here with the connection of the plaza with the trail," said Mark Lieberth, project manager with the consulting firm Land Planning & Design Associates (LPDA). "The intersection will be fully signalized for pedestrians. We will have push button signals. They only would be needed when pedestrians are at the intersection. At other times, the signals would remain green for motorists traveling Patton Street."

In addition to the trail connection, the project includes the construction of restrooms at the plaza. The restrooms originally were included as part of the construction of the plaza, which is scheduled for completion by December.

"The restrooms had to be pulled from that project because of cost," Lieberth said. "We are now putting them back in with this project."

Lieberth said the building would be designed to blend in with the surrounding structures.

Under the current timetable, final designs would be ready in December and submitted for approval to the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). If approved quickly by VDOT, the city would advertise in January for construction bids. Construction would begin in mid-March and end in mid-September. Two of the three bridge lanes would remain open during construction.

The cost of the project is projected at \$1.25 million.

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