Richlands’ Clinch River Pedestrian Walkway Extension Conceptual Design

Prepared for the Town of Richlands, VA
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Richlands, a small town in the mountains of southwest Virginia, is located near the origins of the Clinch River, a 135 mile river which flows through the Great Appalachian Valley before joining the Tennessee River. The Clinch, along with the Powell River, is considered one of the only ecologically intact (undammed) headwaters of the Tennessee River system and is the home of a number of rare and endangered species.¹

Originally established as a planned community whose economy would be supported by mining of rich coal deposits, Richlands was intended to be the Pittsburgh (PA) of the South by the Clinch Valley Coal and Iron Company of Philadelphia. The coming of the Norfolk & Western Railroad supported the capital investment to create a town that would manufacture products such as steel, brick, and glass. It also showcased the deluxe Hotel Richlands and other businesses as well as residential areas. Because the Town was uniquely situated along the Clinch River, the plan encompassed development and growth along both sides of the river. One particular stretch of railway, which paralleled the Clinch River, was used for transporting raw materials for brick manufacturing. It was this piece of original railroad track bed that paved a way to the future. In 2000, the Town of Richlands received a Transportation Enhancement grant from the Virginia Department of Transportation to create a
walking trail along the old railroad track in order to connect the Williams Field/Critterville Playground to downtown Richlands.\textsuperscript{2} The trail’s official name is the Clinch River Pedestrian Walkway. A portion of the trail was built, but plans to connect the trail to downtown Richlands were not completed.

The Community Design Assistance Center was tasked with developing a conceptual design for a greenway that extends the existing walking trail approximately 1.67 miles to complete the connection to downtown and a historic swinging bridge. The goal would be to provide increased benefits and equal access to the river for the larger community.\textsuperscript{3}

\textsuperscript{1}Taken from the Nature Conservancy (1/29/13)
\textsuperscript{2}Taken from the Town of Richlands Application (2/25/13)
\textsuperscript{3}Taken from the Town of Richlands Application (2/25/13)
The design process began with an initial site visit to Cleveland in June 2013. The CDAC team met with project stakeholders and walked along sections of the Clinch River and downtown Richlands to assess possible route options and focal areas. By gathering on-site data and documenting the site, the team was able to understand the opportunities and constraints for the greenway extension. This analysis would later influence the design concepts.

After careful consideration of all the factors, a set of preliminary conceptual design alternatives were developed and presented to the community in July, 2013. The team worked closely with the community members to better understand their vision for the greenway. After the presentation, tables were set up with different focal areas of the greenway where community members could discuss their interests. Based on community feedback, the design alternatives were then revised and combined into a final conceptual master plan.

The final master plans were presented at a second and final community meeting in September, 2013.
During the initial site visit to Richlands, the team inventoried existing site elements and analyzed site conditions. The inventory was predominantly based on topography, property ownership, vehicular and railroad circulation, open space areas, views, surrounding landscape character, potential access points to the river, and potential access points to the greenway from residential neighborhoods and the hospital. These items became the foundation for analysis studies that would lead to a conceptual understanding of possible routing options for the trail system.

The inventory and analysis maps can be seen on the following pages.
Richlands, VA
Inventory
"Brown's Field"
Potential Park Space
1:150

North

Existing Businesses
- Richlands Shopping Mall
- Parking Lots
- Storage Yards
- Private Businesses

Possible Trail and Park Space
- Private Property
- Adjoining Church
- Open green space

Residential

Civic
- Church property for sale
- Baptist Church

Swinging Bridge
- Pedestrian Transportation
- Access

Automobile Circulation

Clinch River

Inventory: Swinging Bridge Area
Richlands, VA
Inventory
“Andy’s Field”
Potential Park Space
1:150

- Existing Businesses
  - Auto Repair
  - Storage Yards
  - Private Businesses
  - Shopping Mall

- Existing
  - Britt’s Park

- Possible Trail and Park Space
  - Private property
  - Adjoining open green space
  - Possible Trail Space in Urban Forested

- Residential

- Automobile Circulation
  - Clinch River

Inventory: Britt’s Park Area
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Inventory: Business Incubator Area

Richlands, VA
Inventory
"Incubator"
Potential Nature Park
1:150

North

- Attractions
  - Brick Sculpture
  - Town Mural
- Existing Businesses
  - Shopping Districts
  - Private Businesses
- Municipal
- Existing
  - Existing Critterville Trail
- Urban Forested

Automobile Circulation
Railroad Circulation
Clinch River

1. Existing buildings
2. Critterville River Walking Trail
3. Supply Yard
4. Skyline Overlook Top Level View
5. Automobile Circle
Richlands Walking Trail Extension
July 11, 2013

Site Analysis: Context

Disclaimer: This drawing is conceptual and was prepared to show approximate location and arrangement of site features. It is subject to change and is not intended to replace the use of construction documents. The client should consult appropriate professionals before any construction or site work is undertaken. The Community Design Assistance Center is not responsible for the inappropriate use of this drawing.

Outreach Center of the College of Architecture + Urban Studies, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Richlands Historic Districts
- West End
- East End

Civic
- Richlands Christian Academy
- Church Property (for sale)
- Baptist Church

Existing Businesses
- Auto Repair
- Shopping Districts
- Private Businesses
- Crayon Manufacturer

Existing Park
- Baseball Fields, Municipal
- Critterville Park

Urban Forested
- Vegetated areas
- Potential Park Land (Private Property)

Residential

Municipal
- Police Department
- Town Hall
- School

Attractions
- Farmers Market
- Veterans Memorial
- Brick Sculpture
- Town Mural
- Foreman's House
- Coal Miners' Memorial

- Britt's Park

Public Points of Trail Entry
- Swinging Bridge Public Point of Entry
- Richlands Middle School and High School
- Tazewell County Library
- Town Hall
- Richlands Christian Academy
SITE ANALYSIS: COMPILED
Richlands’ Clinch River Pedestrian Walkway Extension Conceptual Design

SITE ANALYSIS: 1

July 11, 2013

Community Design Assistance Center
Very poor connection to neighborhoods on opposite side of Front St. Crosswalk and sidewalks needed.

Opportunity to connect residential and local businesses to trail.

Beautiful path established along bank through trailer park.

Browne’s Field, potential nature park space, picnic area, and access point to river.

Very narrow between building and bank. Bank restabilization needed.