

Extend the greenway

For local residents, the Emily Taylor Greenway winding along the bank of Lovill Creek is an asset that we practically take for granted.

Extending that recreational option with a greenway along the Ararat River could turn Mount Airy's trails and waterways into an asset known well beyond the boundaries of the town. As the focus on tourism shifts in many areas to taking advantage of natural resources such as scenic beauty, waterways and parks, development of a second trail could only help by providing another venue to draw visitors to town.

Applying for a Parks and Recreation Trust Fund grant from the state is the first step in turning that vision into reality.

The city has already pledged the funds it will need to provide the matching dollars for the grant as part of the streambank restoration work and plans to begin construction of the greenway. It has also done much of the work that would be needed to obtain easements that would allow for not only the streambank project, but possibly for a trail along the waterway as well.

The proposed greenway would include walking and nature trails, an outdoor shelter and an environmental park. It could be close enough to Mount Airy Middle School and B.H. Tharrington Elementary to open up a new recreation outlet to students there, and the opportunity to learn more about the work around them by exploring the stream and the H. B. Rowe Environmental Park. If the trail were eventually linked with the existing greenway, it would extend even further that opportunity.

We're pleased that Mount Airy is moving forward with its new commitment to recreation in seeking the grant and in planning for future upgrades such as canoe access points, lighting and parking along the trail's route. At the same time, we're hopeful that the state will recognize the potential for the area's residents, the city's schoolchildren and visitors who will be able to take advantage of what is now an asset with restricted availability.

While we clearly see the potential value — looking at the walkers, bikers and joggers on the existing greenway is enough to prove that — we hope the state will do so as well and provide the funds to turn the vision into a reality.