



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: Friday, April 3, 2026.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. Contact [Gage Harter](#) with any questions.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Roanoke County
Program Title: West Roanoke River Greenway Feasibility Study
Program Category: Community Development, Economic Development, & Land Use

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2026 VACo Achievement Award Submission
Community Development, Economic Development, & Land Use
Roanoke County Planning Department
West Roanoke River Greenway Feasibility Study

Executive Summary

Adopted November 18, 2025, the West Roanoke River Greenway Feasibility Study identifies potential alignments for extending the Roanoke River Greenway from Green Hill Park to the Montgomery County line, supporting the long-discussed Valley to Valley Trail connecting regional greenway systems. The corridor poses challenges including steep terrain, active rail lines, fragmented land ownership, and early resident skepticism.

Roanoke County led a three-and-a-half-year in-house planning process with technical assistance from the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program. Rather than selecting a single preferred route, the study identified multiple potentially viable alignments. The extended process also provided time to build community understanding and reduce opposition. The final document emphasizes research-based benefits of greenways.

A multi-agency steering committee guided the study, with consultation from utilities, transportation agencies, and institutional stakeholders. Public engagement included two rounds of community meetings, surveys, targeted mailings, and public hearings, generating 174 meeting attendees and 291 survey responses.

Produced largely with existing staff resources, the study minimized costs while leveraging local expertise. It has supported updates to the Roanoke Valley Greenway Plan and provided momentum to close remaining gaps in the Roanoke River Greenway east of Green Hill Park. In the long term, the study lays groundwork for the Valley to Valley Trail, which would create a continuous regional network linking the Roanoke and New River valleys and delivering health, economic, and quality-of-life benefits across southwest Virginia.

Introduction

Adopted by the Roanoke County Board of Supervisors on November 18, 2025, the West Roanoke River Greenway Feasibility Study identifies potentially viable alignments for the Roanoke River

Greenway in western Roanoke County between Green Hill Park and the Montgomery County line. It was drafted in-house by Roanoke County Planning staff with limited technical assistance from the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (NPS-RTCA) program.

Problem, Challenge, or Situation Faced by the Locality

In each iteration of the Roanoke Valley Greenway Plan adopted since the 1995 Roanoke Valley Conceptual Greenway Plan, the Roanoke River Greenway is identified as the highest priority among Roanoke Valley greenways and is recommended to run through western Roanoke County to the Montgomery County line. To date, the vast majority of efforts to develop the Roanoke River Greenway have focused on the approximately 25-mile section between Green Hill Park in western Roanoke County and Explore Park in eastern Roanoke County, as most of the Roanoke Valley's population lives between these two parks.

In 2020, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) initiated a Valley to Valley Trail Study to begin to explore potential routes for the Valley to Valley Trail, a concept long discussed by Roanoke Valley and New River Valley leaders that would connect the Roanoke River Greenway to the Huckleberry Trail in Christiansburg or Blacksburg, the Riverway Trail in Radford, and the New River Trail in Pulaski. The Valley to Valley Trail would require the Roanoke River Greenway to be extended west from Green Hill Park to the Montgomery County line, but the draft VDOT Valley to Valley Trail Study – intended to be a preliminary high-level overview focused on existing transportation corridors – contained limited options for doing this. In early 2022, Roanoke County initiated the West Roanoke River Greenway Feasibility Study to examine a wider range of potential routes for the Roanoke River Greenway between Green Hill Park and Montgomery County with an approach that incorporated more detailed local knowledge of this corridor.

The area between Green Hill Park and Montgomery County presents very challenging conditions for constructing a greenway, including steep topography, a winding river path, two active rail lines, and land that is held in small parcels by many different landowners. On top of these challenges, early in the

public outreach process many residents of western Roanoke County expressed skepticism towards, if not outright opposition to, the idea of a greenway near their home.

How the Program Fulfilled the Awards Criteria

Innovation

Facing pervasive “not in my backyard” attitudes about greenways in western Roanoke County, the study steering committee (consisting of staff from Roanoke County, the National Park Service, Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission, Roanoke Valley Greenway Commission, and Virginia Department of Transportation) slowed the process down. There was three and a half years between study kickoff in June 2022 and adoption in November 2025 and the committee adjusted expectations for the West Roanoke River Greenway Feasibility Study by reframing it as a review of all potentially viable routes for the West Roanoke River Greenway rather than an identification of the most viable potential route. This patient approach helped reassure skeptical residents of western Roanoke County that the West Roanoke River Greenway is a potential project that Roanoke County is in the early stages of exploring, not a project that Roanoke County plans on forcing upon them in the very near future.

Additionally, the steering committee took an outside-the-box approach to the final study document, devoting significant space to outlining the health, economic, and quality of life benefits of greenways in a substantive, research-backed manner that meets western Roanoke County residents where they are. The Steering Committee took an honest look at where community support for the West Roanoke River Greenway stood and decided to take a step back an attempt to highlight to western Roanoke County residents some ways in which a greenway could be directly beneficial to them and their community. The result was that after early community meetings in which those opposed to the project greatly outnumbered those in favor of it, the eventual Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors public hearings for the adoption of the study saw a similar number of citizens express support for the study compared to those who expressed opposition to it.

Along with the final 165-page study document, a shorter, more graphically oriented study summary was created that efficiently communicates the most important takeaways of the study. This 12-

page study summary will be distributed to County Supervisors, Planning Commissioners, and others who may have influence over the West Roanoke River Greenway project but lack a hands-on role in greenway design and construction. The study summary will more effectively communicate the findings of the study to elected officials who may not have the time to digest the full study.

Partnership or Collaboration

The West Roanoke River Greenway Feasibility Study was guided by a steering committee consisting of staff from the Roanoke County Planning Department, Roanoke County Parks, Recreation & Tourism Department, National Park Service, Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission, Roanoke Valley Greenway Commission, and Virginia Department of Transportation. In involving staff from diverse local, regional, state, and federal agencies, the study ensures that the West Roanoke River Greenway project is considered through the lens of both small-scale and big-picture priorities and will help to keep this project on the radar at all relevant levels of government.

Six stakeholder groups were also consulted periodically throughout the study process – Montgomery County, Western Virginia Regional Jail, Appalachian Power, Western Virginia Water Authority, Virginia Passenger Rail Authority, and the Roanoke Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited. Western Virginia Regional Jail leadership were particularly excited about the project, which led to the identification of potential greenway segment on the jail property being identified as a top priority for further study in the final West Roanoke River Greenway Feasibility Study.

Model for Other Localities

The West Roanoke River Greenway Feasibility Study not only demonstrates how localities can take meaningful steps towards advancing projects that possess broad regional support but face “not in my backyard” resistance, it also demonstrates how localities can utilize existing staff to carry out detailed planning studies with additional assistance from outdoor recreation experts at no additional cost.

The first step Roanoke County Planning staff took in leading the study was to apply for technical assistance from National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (NPS-RTCA) in early 2022, which was awarded. NPS-RTCA staff aided Roanoke County staff in undertaking this study

from beginning to end, providing outside perspective and expertise at no additional cost to the County. This approach not only saved Roanoke County tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of dollars in consultant fees, it ensured that the study was undertaken by the County staff who are most familiar with the study area, as opposed to consultants who are learning basic facts about the study area at the same time that they are formulating recommendations for it.

How the Program Was Carried Out

Development of the West Roanoke River Greenway Feasibility Study spanned roughly three and a half years from kickoff in June 2022 to adoption in November 2025. The first few months focused on existing conditions research, followed by public outreach beginning in October 2022. Two rounds of public outreach were held for the West Roanoke River Greenway Feasibility Study – two community meetings and a survey in Fall 2022 and two community meetings and a survey in Summer 2023. The four community meetings drew a total of 174 attendees, and the two surveys received a total of 291 responses. Mailings, including paper surveys, were sent to all residents and landowners in the study area to publicize these community meetings. Between the two rounds of public outreach, corridor stakeholders were consulted. After the second round of community meetings, the document was drafted by Roanoke County Planning staff. Open-ended comments were solicited in Fall 2025 before the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors public hearings. The Planning Commission public hearing was held on November 3, 2025, and the Board of Supervisors public hearing, at which the study was adopted, was held on November 18, 2025.

The study was produced in-house by the Roanoke County Planning Department, with limited assistance from NPS-RTCA staff, requiring only costs for staff, software, and printing, all of which save for printing – a few hundred dollars – were already accounted for in the County’s annual budget.

Program Results

The West Roanoke River Greenway Feasibility Study effort contributed to the June 2025 adoption of a five-year update to the Roanoke Valley Greenway Plan, featuring a revised recommendation

map. It has helped buoy a general regional enthusiasm about completing the Roanoke River Greenway. In 2025, Roanoke County completed construction of 4 miles of new greenway. In November 2025, a ribbon cutting was held to mark the opening of the West Roanoke River Greenway Phase 1 just east of Green Hill Park. Only a short gap of roughly 0.6 mile remains between the West Roanoke River Greenway Phase 1 and Green Hill Park. Roanoke County is currently seeking funding to close this gap. In May 2026, a ribbon cutting will be held for the East Roanoke River Greenway between the Blue Ridge Parkway and Explore Park.

In the long term, the West Roanoke River Greenway Feasibility Study lays the foundation for the Roanoke County portion of the future Valley to Valley Trail, a concept long discussed by Roanoke Valley and New River Valley leaders that would connect the Roanoke River Greenway to the Huckleberry Trail in Christiansburg or Blacksburg, the Riverway Trail in Radford, and the New River Trail in Pulaski. If the Valley to Valley Trail is completed, it would create a contiguous greenway and trail network running from eastern Roanoke County to the City of Galax, and would bring health, economic, and quality of life benefits to a large swath of southwest Virginia. The West Roanoke River Greenway Feasibility Study builds upon the 2025 VDOT Valley to Valley Trail Study to more closely explore potential paths for the Roanoke River Greenway (and future Valley to Valley Trail) in western Roanoke County and begin direct public outreach to the citizens of western Roanoke County. It is a necessary step towards eventually making the Valley to Valley Trail a reality.