

## News Release



For Immediate Release

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### **Riverfront Park Ribbon Cutting and Otter-Ly Amazing Trail Launch**

*City's first smart park welcomes visitors to downtown*

**(Fredericksburg, VA) May 21, 2022** – Fredericksburg celebrated the opening of Riverfront Park and the launch of Fredericksburg Main Street's Otter-ly Amazing Fredericksburg Project on Saturday, May 21, 2022.

Riverfront Park, located at 713 Sophia Street (encompassing the 500-700 blocks) in Historic Downtown, is a nearly 4-acre property and the city's first "smart park." As its name suggests, it features fantastic Rappahannock River views and includes open space, event space, an interactive water feature, a meadow area, and a children's play area. Riverfront Park is located across the street from the City's public parking garage, where abundant parking is available and is free for the first 3 hours. Future restrooms are being planned for the park, and for now a public restroom is 440 feet away at the Visitor Center, 706 Caroline Street.

Designed to be a hub for downtown events and culture, Riverfront Park was the natural "home base" for the mother Otter in Fredericksburg Main Street's Otter-ly Amazing Trail. This exciting partnership between the downtown business community and the City of Fredericksburg seeks to promote the precious Rappahannock River ecosystem and the city's rich arts community through an interactive art experience in historic downtown. "We look forward to the public "hunting" for the bronze river otters downtown and enjoying all the wonderful restaurants, coffee shops, and retail along the way," said April Peterson, lead on the Otter-ly Amazing Fredericksburg Project. "The otter will now proudly serve as a symbol of the health and vitality of our city, and each otter sculpture will inform residents and tourists about the attributes of beautiful Downtown Fredericksburg." The public is invited to participate! Find out more online at: [www.fxbgotters.com](http://www.fxbgotters.com).

As the city's first "smart park," Riverfront Park is the first park in the region to provide solar-powered lighting, free public Wi-Fi, flood sensors, and security cameras. The free public Wi-Fi service enables people visiting Riverfront Park to access the Internet through their own wireless-enabled devices, such as laptops and PDAs.

Thanks to the City's partnership and a \$75,000 grant from Virginia Innovation Partnership Corporation (VIPIC), more expansive plans for Riverfront Park were integrated into the park design with smart

technology that will be implemented in phases. "In 2018 Fredericksburg was the very first community to step forward and collaborate as part of the Virginia Innovation Partnership Corporation (VIPIC) Smart Communities initiatives. It is very exciting to see those early visions come to life in a great community space like Riverfront Park that incorporates some of the latest Internet of Things and public Wi-Fi technologies as one part of the community place-making activity. We look forward to continued collaboration with Fredericksburg as a leading innovation partner," stated Dave Ihrie, CTO and Vice President of Strategic Initiatives, VIPIC.

Riverfront Park is prepared for future improvements as well. The park is fully plumbed and pad ready for future restrooms, pending the new FEMA map updates expected next year. The stage area is prepped with all electrical work, and City staff is already working to attract private donations and grant funding for a potential permanent stage. The park will also be a central hub for pedestrian activity as Fredericksburg continues to pursue trail development, with efforts that will eventually link Motts Run Reservoir to Dixon Park.

The park's signage will work to interpret and share the City's rich history with new audiences who visit. Six different archaeological investigations were conducted in the park area prior to construction, revealing a rich history of activity spanning from the prehistoric Native American presence through the Civil War to a community hub in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Construction at the park was carefully designed to leave some of the most significant findings intact below the ground.

The park is a collaborative work to live a vision outlined as many as three decades ago. City Council appointed the Riverfront Park Task Force, which labored through much of the past decade to bring ideas, concepts and budget estimates to the community. The Mayor and City Council identified the Riverfront Park as Priority #7 in their 2036 Vision work (accomplished in 2016) and directed staff to build the park in 2017. Design and engineering work concluded in 2018, and the project was put to bid for construction in 2019. This would not have been possible without the dedication of many citizen volunteers including the Riverfront Park Task Force and our Face the River friends. The City also thanks the many service providers who helped design and build this park, including, but not limited to: Rhodeside and Harwell, Athena Construction Group, Downey and Scott, Dovetail Cultural Resources Group, Mutualink, Integrated Security Technologies and Tree Fredericksburg.

The City investment in this park is a fraction of the \$40+ million in public investments (more than half is the Commonwealth's Chatham Bridge project) in the past decade or so in Downtown with trails, colonial lights, brick pavers, Small Area Plans, the public parking garage, etc. These investments are meant, in part, to create sustainability for our business community as they increasingly upgrade properties and create jobs in our Downtown Fredericksburg.

Riverfront Park is open daily, and is closed from 10pm to 5am. For more information please visit [fredericksburgva.gov](http://fredericksburgva.gov) or call 540-372-1086.

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