

County of Roanoke - Explore Park Highlights

Explore Park is Roanoke County's flagship park at 1,100 acres of leased park land serving as a destination for citizens and tourists. The park provides outdoor education and recreation for all ages and abilities while serving as driver for economic development thanks to its rich culture of providing opportunities for small and start up businesses.



History

- The Virginia Recreational Facilities Authority (“VRFA”) was established in 1986 to create a park along the Roanoke River to conserve natural resources and foster tourism and economic development.
- In 2013, the VRFA leased the park to Roanoke County for 99 years.
- Roanoke County has invested over \$8 million in park infrastructure, including utilities, roads, trails, and recreational facilities, transforming it into a regional destination for both residents and tourists.

Current Investments, Activities, and Goals

- Over the past 11 years, Roanoke County revitalized Explore Park with public-private investment, expanding programs and attracting over 250,000 annual visitors (up from 30,000 in 2013).
- The park now hosts annual signature events such as USA cycling championships, Illuminights, Tavern Stage Concert Series, and Go Fest Adventure Outpost.
- Roanoke County aims to fully implement the park master plan to attract further public-private partnerships.



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Ownership

- The VRFA has not provided significant funding to Explore Park for over a decade.
- The current land ownership arrangement hinders private sector investment in major projects such as a lodge or restaurant.
- Roanoke County has consistently invested in Explore Park, recognizing its value as a regional asset for tourism, outdoor education, health, leisure activity, and conservation, while driving positive economic impact to the community.

Looking to the Future

- To accelerate Explore Park's development, Roanoke County seeks to acquire VRFA-owned properties in both Bedford and Roanoke Counties.
- Bedford County supports this initiative.

*****Both Roanoke County and Bedford County urge the passage of SB 796 or HB 2321 to transfer park property to Roanoke County.*****