

Over the river and through the city



Jessica Kemp, senior project manager, sits by a portion of the new trail while explaining its route. The new route runs along the West Ellerbee Creek. Photo by Tessa Platek.

Durham's new trail will add color and connect communities

By Tessa Platek
The Durham Voice

In busy urban areas, sometimes there's nothing better than escaping the city to enjoy nature. An addition to the West Ellerbee Creek Trail is making it easier to do for Durham's residents.

Phase II will be added to the existing 30 miles of trails, running north along the West Ellerbee Creek. It will connect the original West Ellerbee Creek Trail to the North-South trail.

The trail is 1.5 miles of accessible walkway, providing safe travel for pedestrians who previously would have struggled to cross heavily populated roads such as Interstate 85.

The trail also joins parts of Durham that were previously difficult to reach on foot, connecting the Watts-Hillandale neighborhood to the Stadium Heights neighborhood and intersecting with the shopping center on North Point Drive and residential communities along the way.

While connecting locals to important parts of the city, the trail will also guide residents through wooded areas they may not have previously visited.

"It's going to connect people to parts of Durham they haven't seen before," said Jessica Kemp, Durham senior project manager.

The trail cost about \$2.9 million to complete. The trail's benefits qualified Durham for funding from the U.S. Department of Transportation.

"This trail will help reduce emissions from vehicles and traffic ... and encourages people to use healthier means of transportation, and so we were able to qualify for federal dollars for the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program," Kemp said.

The trail will provide entertainment for locals as well. The construction of the physical trail is completed, but there are plans to

continue embellishing and improving the area with new installations, such as guiding lines on the trail, creative distance markers and small play areas.

"There are some spots along the trail that have created these large open spaces," Kemp said. "And we're hoping to come back in and use that as an opportunity to create some pocket parks."

Dare Coulter and Jonathan Massullo plan to decorate the exterior of a tunnel along the trail.

Coulter is a 24-year-old artist from Fuquay-Varina. Much of her work is focused on social justice and healing. She has painted murals before.

Massullo is middle school art teacher from Raleigh. When he's not teaching the next generation of artists, he creates his own art using various mediums.

The two artists were selected using Durham's Call for Artists, a recently created mailing list which notifies local artists about upcoming opportunities for future art submissions and projects.

While the exterior of the tunnel will be decorated by selected artists, anyone can display their art on the interior.

"The cool thing is we've got this 160-foot-long tunnel that we've been able to call and keep the Free Expression Tunnel, and we feel like that is a good opportunity for anyone to come out and practice their skills on," Kemp said.

The two artists will attend the trail's opening celebration from 5:30-7:00 p.m. March 22 at Westover Park, located at 1900 Maryland Ave.

For more information on the West Ellerbee Creek Trail and upcoming events in Durham visit <https://durhamnc.gov/>.