



Friends of the Lower Appomattox River

March 29, 2024

Martha Shickle, Executive Director  
Richmond Regional Planning District Commission  
424 Hull St. Suite 300  
Richmond, VA 23224

**Subject: Letter of Support for PlanRVA's application for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Climate Pollution Reduction Grant, Funding Opportunity EPA-R-OAR-CPRGI-23-07**

Dear Ms. Shickle:

As Executive Director of the Friends of the Lower Appomattox River (FOLAR), I am writing to express my strong support for the CPRG Implementation Grant application, led by PlanRVA, in coalition with the Central Virginia Transportation Authority (CVTA) and the City of Petersburg, for gap fill funding for the Fall Line Trail and the connection to the Appomattox River Trail.

This application, if successful, will fill critical gaps in the ambitious and transformative Fall Line Trail project, as well as the first planned connection to another developing regional trail network, the 25-mile Appomattox River Trail, which will connect Petersburg and the Tri-Cities Region to the Richmond Region. The scale and complexity of the 43-mile shared-use Fall Line Trail, which passes through dense urban areas and rural communities, has exhausted existing bike/ped funding sources. At the same time, the gaps and regional trail connection named in this application have been especially difficult to fund due to the complex trail design needs. Without CPRG Implementation Grant Funds to complete construction in these critical segments, the function of the Fall Line Trail as a continuous shared-use north-south active transportation artery will be compromised.

The Fall Line project brings together seven jurisdictions and will be the foundation of an expanding bike/ped network across the region. The complete Fall Line Trail, from Ashland to Petersburg, Virginia, will be transformative for the Richmond MSA and will especially bring benefits to low-income disadvantaged communities through improved air quality, improved physical fitness, increased community cohesion, and safe transportation access. By connecting the Fall Line to the Appomattox River Trail, five additional jurisdictions will be connected to the Richmond Region, thus expanding the network.

FOLAR has supported the Fall Line Trail development since its inception and is dedicated to seeing it through to completion. For more than 20 years, FOLAR has worked in partnership with the community to protect, conserve and promote the Appomattox River for all to enjoy. We are accomplishing that mission by developing the 25-mile Appomattox River Trail. This

regional trail system passes through three counties and three cities along the State Designated Scenic River in the Tri-Cities Region, just 30 miles south of the state capital. Our mission is unique in that we are protecting a valuable natural resource that provides drinking water to the region, while also promoting economic development, a high quality of life, and providing alternative transportation modes to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

FOLAR is the only environmental nonprofit working solely in the Tri-Cities Region, a region that ranks high and moderate on the Virginia Social Vulnerability Index (VIMS). Our communities have low rates of car ownership, high rates of poverty and high rates of preventable chronic disease. Two cities, Petersburg and Hopewell, rank 133 and 131 (out of 133) on the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation County/City Health Factors Rankings. Numerous studies show that access to trails and green space has multiple co-benefits to a community including reduced greenhouse air emissions, which can lead to a reduction of asthma. Trails can provide a safe space for the community to gather and to travel to schools, jobs and other daily destinations. Trails can become an economic engine attracting tourists and employers to the region.

PlanRVA, CVTA, and the City of Petersburg are trusted partners and uniquely well-suited to help close these critical last gaps in our ambitious regional active transportation project. We look forward to the modality shift that the Climate Pollution Reduction Program can help bring to the Richmond MSA and want to reiterate our strong support for this coalition application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wendy Austin", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Wendy Austin  
FOLAR Executive Director  
(804) 543-0325