

Media Release

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New Waterfront Park to Open

Big “Win” for First Locally Based Land Trust

VIRGINIA BEACH – The Living River Restoration Trust will host opening ceremonies at 3 pm Wednesday for one of its first big wins as a new land conservation non-profit, Ferry Point Park.

The new park represents nine acres of wetlands and forest to be conserved forever as part of raising awareness of the Elizabeth River’s “lost branch,” the most neglected and least known Eastern Branch. The first locally based land trust in South Hampton Roads, the non-profit Living River Restoration Trust, www.livingrivertrust.org, led a three-year effort to preserve the land with multiple partners.

“This beautiful new park is an important milestone for us. It sets the bar for much more to come to conserve the last lands of the Elizabeth River, and helps put the Eastern Branch back on the map,” said Diana L. Bailey, chair of the non-profit.

The City of Virginia Beach will operate the park and contributed purchase funds along with the Land and Water Conservation Fund, administered by Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, and the Virginia Outdoors Foundation.

Virginia Beach City Councilwoman Jessica Abbott will lead the ribbon-cutting during the brief 3 pm ceremony with project partners at the site, 5544 Normandy Avenue. The event is invitation-only due to limited parking. The media is invited to attend.

Adding to more than 600 acres conserved so far by the local land trust, Ferry Point Park is the trust’s first site on the Elizabeth River’s Eastern Branch. As funds become available, the park will offer the first kayaking access on the south shore of this branch. Initially the site opens as a passive park in the neighborhood of Avalon Woods. The civic league there chose the park’s name, a historical reference. About 100 students from Old Donation School spent Earth Day sprucing up the site with City staff. The City also has removed a dilapidated house, improved the driveway and begun mulched trails.

“Projects like this are important because research tells us, and common sense supports, that there is a direct correlation between mental and physical health and

access to nearby open space for people who live in urban environments,” said Brett Glymph, executive director of the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, a state-chartered foundation that protects nearly 850,000 acres of open space and holds a permanent conservation easement on the park.

The Trust bought the site last year from Virginia Beach resident Wayne Doolin for \$265,000, securing \$141,525 from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, \$73,475 from the City of Virginia Beach Open Space Program, and \$50,000 from the Virginia Outdoors Foundation. The Trust gifted the land to the City after donating significant project management, legal and real estate assistance.

Landowners also can participate in land conservation on the Elizabeth River by retaining ownership of high value open space while gaining tax benefits from placing the land in conservation easements with the Trust. The group’s current top focus area is the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River, where some of the largest tracts of forest and wetlands remain. Interested landowners can contact Dave Koubsky, dkoubsky@elizabethriver.org.

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