





with Mayor Knox White

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In October, we sat down with Greenville Mayor Knox White to discuss the success of Falls Park, its impact on development in the West End and its popularity with just about everybody.

GM: First question, what's next for the other side of downtown?

White: I would say “keep following the river.” Falls Park is just the start. RiverPlace still has one more phase on the river. You’ll see another hotel and more office and housing development. The art studios on the river have been successful enough to encourage more retail, restaurants, etc., in the next wave of development. Once RiverPlace reaches River Street, our city will have a true “river walk” experience.

GM: Does that pretty well conclude the development on the river?

White: No. The Convention and Visitors Bureau wants to construct an exciting visitors center complex just across the street. It has a lot of support from the county and the city. Then there is the Children’s Garden, a real hidden asset, and the Kroc Center, which will open up a vast area on the other side of Academy Street. We have a tremendous opportunity to capture acres of floodplain property in this vicinity and create new green space for a future park system. Running through all of this, however, is the “next big thing” for Greenville.

GM: What's that?

White: It’s the system of bike, walking and jogging trails that are now under construction in the city and the county. We call it the Reedy River Greenway and Swamp Rabbit Trail and soon it will be the talk of the town, in my view. It was kicked off last year with our one-mile trail along the Reedy.

GM: Why will be, as you said, “big”?

White: Because everywhere in the country where people are given the opportunity to bike, walk or jog through a system of public pathways, the response is overwhelming. Like Falls Park, people are going to be crazy about the trail system once they experience it. While Greenville is a little late in all of this, we still have the chance to have one of the nation’s premiere trail systems. I have seen and explored many of them around the country. Austin, Texas comes to mind. Hardly any of them, however, run through a destination center like our downtown. That really makes us unique.

GM: What impact do trails or greenways have on the communities?

White: First, they promote a healthy lifestyle, and that is important. Second, they are amazing catalyst for development. Wherever you see these trails, you see new apartments and housing near and around the trails. Resale is affected, too, in a very favorable way. People want to buy houses near the trails.

GM: What is our trail system going to look like?

White: The county recreation district is constructing the trail down from Traveler’s Rest and Furman. It should connect with the city’s trail this spring. Then the city trail runs through Falls Park and Cleveland Park. We just finished the latest leg that runs behind the YMCA and First Baptist. Next year it will run through Greenville Tech to Pleasantburg Drive. That makes it accessible to many, many neighborhoods. You could literally start walking or biking at Parkins Mill Road, get on the trail at Pleasantburg and make the whole 22-mile journey to Furman and Traveler’s Rest by foot or bike. Or just go downtown.

And, we are already talking to entrepreneurs who are ready to offer bike rental services. One more note. The section of the Swamp Rabbit that starts in downtown and goes up to Traveler’s Rest is an old railroad line, so it is flat. Anyone can use it, no excuses!

GM: How about the other parts of the city? Will the trail reach them?

White: The plan is to start with the river greenway and then begin making connections to as many neighborhoods as possible. There are some great trail system plans for almost all parts of the city. Since the trail system connects to downtown and the county’s Swamp Rabbit Trail, it qualifies for hospitality tax money, which is the source of the funding.

GM: So the trail is part of the Falls Park legacy?

White: In a way it is. Falls Park opened up the river corridor in a way nothing else could. And that makes the trail system truly viable. But really, the whole West End is a by-product of Falls Park, including the ball field. If you think about it, it would not have been possible to suggest a ball field at the end of South Main without first having the park as an anchor. The park smashed the psychological barrier of the river and opened the whole West End to a new wave of redevelopment.

GM: And soon it will be all connected with a walking trail?

White: Yes, and a trail that serves neighborhoods across the city and into a great destination: Downtown Greenville.

Look for the Mayor's next Q&A in our April issue.