

Friends of **ESMONT**



Esmont, Virginia

Program Plan & Projects



PROGRAM PLAN

Esmont, Virginia covers a large geographic area including the historic village of Esmont, Porters Road, Chestnut Grove, and many farms surrounding the area. From its beginning in the mid-1800s, Esmont village, located on Esmont Road, was a bustling village with a regional bank, several thriving general stores, a profitable railroad, a wood yard for railroad ties and pulpwood, a slate quarry operation, a livery stable, and doctor's office. This boom continued into the 1950s, when the quarry operation closed. The bank had previously been converted to a post office, the rails and depot were removed, the wood yard vanished, most of the stores had closed, and the historic village of Esmont started into steady decline.

Over the next 60+ years, the historic village of Esmont (Village) deteriorated from a lack of attention from its residents and/or local officials. The Village itself, has never had its own elected officials, nor have Porters Road or Chestnut Grove. However, Porters Road and Chestnut Grove both prospered to some extent, while the Village steadily declined.

Friends of Esmont, Inc., (Friends) a non-profit 501 (c) (3), was started by a former resident of the Village, who upon return to the area after a long absence, was quite dismayed at the deteriorated conditions. Once word got around that an organization had been started with the purpose of bringing life back into the Village, turning it into a destination for locals and visitors, and making it the hub of activity as in the past, people from all around the area and across the country signed up to become Friends of Esmont. The response was so overwhelming that the organization quickly grew and organized, selecting a Board of Directors, setting up a website, and holding regularly scheduled meetings.

This success attracted the town of Scottsville and the village of Alberene to join forces, thereby covering the Southern Corner of Albemarle County, or the *Forgotten* Southern Corner of Albemarle County. These contiguous areas have a population of approximately 4,511 people.

After a couple of meetings with residents, the question was asked of them, "what would you like to see done in the Village to make it an attraction?" A lot of discussion ensued and after several meetings, a list of fourteen (14) projects were identified as helpful to the Village, but also benefiting all the other Esmont areas, particularly Porters Road and Chestnut Grove.

PROGRAM PLAN, continued...

For a new, small organization, fourteen projects seemed too many at one time. Therefore, the next task was to cull the projects down to the top 7 or so. The goal was to have all projects benefit the Village, as well as the surrounding areas, and each project would benefit each other.

The projects getting final approval are listed below. Descriptions of each project are attached showing how each project benefits the community, relates to other projects, the estimated cost for each project, and each project's sustainability. Also attached is a map of the Village of Esmont showing all the structures and 5 of the 7 Projects, along with a map of Albemarle County showing all properties with Esmont addresses in green, Alberene addresses in pink, and Scottsville addresses in yellow.

PROJECT LIST:

- 1. Rails-to-Trails: Esmont-Alberene Quarry Line Trail - *See Update Jan. 2020***
- 2. Rebuild Esmont Depot**
- 3. Restoration of Historic Homes**
- 4. Establish a Wildlife Refuge Along Ballinger Creek**
- 5. Chronicle Esmont History - *See Update Jan. 2020***
- 6. Easy Access to Esmont Fulfillment Farms**
- 7. Purvis Store**

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Though all the projects are interconnected, it is not expected that all seven will be active at the same time, but rather one or, two initially. Rails-to-Trails will take many years to complete; the Purvis Store Project will take several years as will the Restoration of Historic Homes. The other projects should take less time per project.

The decision as to which project to begin with, and when, will be determined primarily by the availability of funds. Land acquisition could present time-lag problems for the Wildlife Refuge, the Depot and Purvis Store.

Rebuilding the Esmont Depot would be an ideal project to begin with, as it would give Esmont its identity back with the "Esmont" signs as a nice visual displayed on each end of the building welcoming residents and visitors. Rebuilding the Depot would also establish the trailhead for the Esmont-Alberene Quarry Line Trail.



1. RAILS-TO-TRAILS: ESMONT-ALBERENE QUARRY LINE TRAIL



PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The Esmont-Alberene Quarry Line Trail is a 5.5-mile trail system from the historic Village of Esmont (the Village) to the Alberene Soapstone Quarry. The Trail uses the abandoned Nelson-Albemarle rail line originally used for stone transport from the quarry to City of Charlottesville's C&O Railroad and the town of Scottsville's Hatton Ferry on the James River.

BENEFIT TO THE COMMUNITY: The benefits to the community are tremendous. Albemarle County, City of Charlottesville, and the town of Scottsville are all working to be interconnected. Esmont lies within that connectivity and could bring in both Alberene and Schuyler, taking bicyclers, walkers, and horseback riders off the narrow roads, putting them on wonderfully scenic trails through old historic farmlands and beautiful quarry sites.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PROJECTS: The newly built Esmont Depot will serve as a Trailhead offering bathroom facilities and a refreshment area, the only such area available for miles.

ESTIMATED COST: Crushed Stone/mile \$100,000; Asphalt/mile \$285,000

SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT: The trail would be incorporated into the Albemarle County trails system.

JANUARY 2020 UPDATE: Friends of Esmont, Inc. has been awarded a one-year planning grant for the Esmont-Alberene Quarry Line Trail which will connect the two villages of Esmont and Alberene, funded by Bama Works Fund of Dave Matthews Band at the Charlottesville Area Community Foundation to be used for Bama Works 2019.

2. REBUILD ESMONT DEPOT



Esmont Depot Being Dismantled, 1964

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The original Depot in the Historic Village of Esmont, (the village), was removed when the railroad tracks were taken up in 1964, taking the Village name signs with it. The Village lost a major part of its identity when it was abandoned by the C&O Railroad.

Friends of Esmont, Inc. has been researching the possibility of rebuilding the depot on or near the original site. Working with the C&O Historical Society and friends of Esmont with strong interest in trains, it was learned a copy of the original drawings of the depot do not exist. However, there are drawings of the standard depot being built at that time that can be used.

BENEFIT TO THE COMMUNITY: A new Depot with the Village name signs on either end would be valuable in helping identify the Village and restoring pride. The Depot would house a small museum containing story boards describing the history of the original Depot and a brief history of the village. With a trailside location, the Depot would serve as a rest stop for those using the trail.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PROJECTS: The Depot would serve as the Trailhead for the Esmont-Alberene Quarry Line Trail. Outdoor bathrooms, snack machines and parking would be provided for those using the trail.

ESTIMATED COST: \$100,000

SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT: The Depot will be given to Albemarle County as part of their trail system.



3. RESTORATION OF HISTORIC HOMES



PROJECT DESCRIPTION: Many of the historic homes, most of which are over 100 years old, along Esmont Road and Red Row Lane in the historic village of Esmont, (the Village), have fallen into disrepair. This project will start by inventorying the homes needing work and interviewing the residents and owners to determine their interest in restoration and specific tasks for each home. Once the initial data gathering is completed funding sources will be identified, builders retained, and restoration will begin for those who qualify.

BENEFIT TO THE COMMUNITY: Historic homes now threatened with being lost will be preserved and the Village will more closely resemble its appearance and charm of the early 20th century. These restored homes will instill pride in the neighborhood as well as provide affordable, attractive housing.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PROJECTS: Other projects aimed at drawing visitors and new residents to the Village will be enhanced as a result of this restoration project.

ESTIMATED COST: To be determined when initial data gathering is completed.

SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT: The maintenance of the restored homes will be agreed upon by the homeowners before the restoration will be started.



4. ESTABLISH A WILDLIFE REFUGE ALONG BALLINGER CREEK



Esmont Purple Martin Houses

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: Ballinger Creek runs through the historic Village of Esmont, (the Village), mostly in an area that is a flood plain, creating a situation ideal for a Wildlife Refuge.

BENEFIT TO THE COMMUNITY: Building a board walk and planting native plants to attract birds, ducks, and other wildlife, would bring life and beauty to that area which could be used for education and research. Creating this outdoor attraction would bring visitors to Esmont and elevate its image as a destination.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PROJECTS: The Trail will run along the Refuge, and the Fulfillment Farm property, owned by the Virginia Wildlife Foundation, abuts some of this property which will attract visitors to all three improvements.

ESTIMATED COST: Land acquisition costs will be approximately \$20,000, building the board walk will cost approximately \$200,000-\$300,000.

SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT: It is proposed that Albemarle Parks & Recreation will maintain the Refuge.



5. CHRONICLE ESMONT HISTORY



PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The history of Esmont does not exist in one single document, but rather in bits and pieces in numerous places. Esmont has a rich history going back to the 1800's when it played an important role in the county and region. It is worthy of being documented and published as a teaching tool.

BENEFIT TO THE COMMUNITY: Chronicling a comprehensive history is likely to be well received and will raise the level of interest in the Village at home and around the community.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PROJECTS: The Lane Family, trains, slate, and soapstone all had major impacts on Esmont leading to the selection of Rails to Trails Project, Rebuilding the Depot Project and Esmont Fulfillment Farm Project involving the Esmont Slate Quarry.

ESTIMATED COST: Research costs for the project: \$20,000. Printing costs: \$3000.

SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT: Publications of Esmont's history will be distributed electronically and in bound booklets.

JANUARY 2020 UPDATE: Friends of Esmont, Inc. has been awarded a grant for a historian to research and write the History of Esmont, funded by Virginia Humanities of Charlottesville. Included in the research: how and when Esmont became a village; the impact of the Soapstone Shortlines rail system; quarry mining of soapstone and slate; the wonderful farms in the immediate area; and face-to-face interviews with folks from Chestnut Grove, Porters and the village of Esmont.



6. EASY ACCESS TO ESMONT FULFILLMENT FARMS



PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The plan is to work with the Virginia Wildlife Foundation to designate the 200 acres of Fulfillment Farms abutting the historic village of Esmont, (the Village), making that land more accessible and family friendly as a recreational area for walkers, hikers, birders, and others.

BENEFIT TO COMMUNITY: This park will create much needed recreational space for the Village.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PROJECTS: The connection to the Wildlife Refuge and the Esmont-Alberene Quarry Trail will provide important recreational opportunities to outdoor enthusiasts.

ESTIMATED COST: One-mile crushed stone path, approximately \$100,000.

SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT: It is proposed that Albemarle Parks & Recreation will maintain the Fulfillment Farms area.

7. PURVIS STORE



Purvis Store - Current State

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: For many years Purvis Store was the hub of activity in the Historic Village of Esmont (the Village). Built in the early 1900s, the store and adjacent outbuilding are listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a Contributing Resource to the Southern Albemarle Rural Historic District.

The store played many roles in serving the Village and nearby residents other than selling groceries and gas and making home deliveries. It was also a message center for those who had no telephone, a recreation center for those who had no television, and a place to go when they needed help.

Restoring this property as the hub of the Village again, instead of allowing its collapse, will bring new life to the Village and surrounding area. The vision is to provide a marketplace for crafts people to sell their wares and perhaps to make them on site. Items sold in the Purvis Store would be locally made or tied to the history of the area, and a small museum of local artifacts will be housed there.

BENEFIT TO COMMUNITY: Purvis Store would attract craftspeople and visitors from around the area and provide economic opportunities to local craftspeople.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PROJECTS: Visitors to the Wildlife Refuge and those on the Esmont-Alberene Quarry Line Trail will enjoy and extend their time in the Village by stopping by the Purvis Store Market.

ESTIMATED COST: \$300,000



HISTORIC VILLAGE OF ESMONT, VA