

To Grow

"Periods of great innovation almost always come in resource-poor periods." – Kaminski & Marshall

Dear Mayor, Town Council, and Friends of Peak Creek,

The Marvel of the Appalachians.

The American Chestnut was a great gift to Pulaski and the region. One out of four hardwoods was an American Chestnut. Our Giant. It was the redwood of the East. Our ancestors relied on it to build cabins, homes, railroad beds, telephone poles, fences and more. Its nuts were so plentiful that farmers turned hogs loose in the forest to fatten them up for winter slaughter. The thick bed of food (nuts left on the forest floor) was a staple for humans and wildlife alike.



All of this culminated in a long death throw beginning in 1904 when an [irremediable blight](#) effectively killed off every mature American Chestnut in the Appalachians. Four billion trees died. Many of these were hundreds of years old as were the [American Chestnuts pictured here in 1910](#).

Sixty-five miles down the road in Meadowview, VA the [American Chestnut Foundation](#), supported by a broad base of philanthropy, scientific effort, and many cooperative groups nationwide, is now against all odds prevailing. We may never see the passenger pigeon and other lost species, but the American Chestnut is now reversing history bringing us back to what we once had and what seemed forever lost. It is a [story that National Geographic and other national news sources](#) have enthusiastically told. It is one of the monumental achievements that Virginians and others have made through persistence and innovation. We have an opportunity to celebrate this success and struggle. And, as will be shown here, by the same act we can pull ourselves up by the bootstraps because, you see, those new blight-resistant American Chestnuts now have taken on a secondary role: reclaiming old stripped coal mine and other blighted properties.

The 99 First St NE location of the former General Chemical Foundry site has been referred to as a brownsfield site with an objective of removing lead contamination. The Town is on track to remove the existing concrete pad and a few feet of soil, placing an impenetrable fabric liner, and then filling with soil. Such a technique is an expensive zero sum game. As will be shown here, it fails on four counts: 1) Economically, 2) Environmentally, 3) Aesthetically, and 4) Benefit to the town.

The American Chestnut and Poplar fix.

There are better solutions. As you will see, the Chestnut Tree Park and Peak Creek proposal here will keep the greater part of the already impenetrable concrete plate and employ [phytoremediation](#) (using plants to suck up contaminants), which has none of the [current plan's adverse consequences](#). For example, [Poplar Trees sequester lead](#) in their biomass and the [American Chestnut has been widely used in coal mine reclamation](#) here in Appalachia.

Bad for the Town Economically.

Court House records show that the assessed value of the property is \$15,000. Reportedly, the remediation is a \$480,000 project – about 32 times the property's assessed value. The portion of it that the citizens of Pulaski will pay is \$240,000. How many grants like this can we afford? This one prorates to \$81 for every family of three in town. It is the kind of project that is apt to be mainly contracted out to hazmat firms outside of the area and we will probably see precious little of the funds ever being spent here in Pulaski.

At six tenths of an acre, the \$480,000 and \$240,000 respectively prorate to \$800,000 per acre for the total cost and \$400,000 per acre for the portion directly paid by the Town. As for the dollar-for-dollar grant money, it is well to remember that the \$240,000 coming from state/federal funds is also derived from financing that less directly trickles down to us via taxes at those levels. As for what's proposed use of the site, the Southwest Times reports it will be "Gardens-to-Table Community Market" with raised bed gardens. Now there are some tomatoes. I will leave it to you to calculate the cost per tomato.

Bad for the Town Environmentally.

The Grant plan is environmentally destructive. To call it environmental remediation is a misnomer. [Lead is an element \(Pb\)](#). It cannot be destroyed. At best it can only be moved from one place to another. Similarly, soil taken from the site will be carried to another location (such as a landfill) which already is, or becomes contaminated when it is placed there. The commonly neglected point is that soil brought to the "remediated" site will be stripped from otherwise good land. It takes between [500 and 1,000](#) years for one inch of topsoil to form naturally. Topsoil is precious. That good land elsewhere is ruined into the indefinitely distant future for purported benefit here.

In this shell game, there is no net gain. It is just moving lead and soil between different locations and ruining a distant plot of good land for the supposed "remediation" of urban land. Worse yet, placing an impenetrable fabric liner beneath the soil on First Street ruins it forever for normal and attractive tree and shrubbery growth.

Bad for the Town Aesthetically.

For your deliberation, I mention for example what in years past has been my sloppy method of gardening at the Town's Community Garden on Rt 99 (which incidentally I think is a wonderful program). I took care of my plot passably well at the beginning of the season, but by the end it was distinctly on the weedy and ratty side. I feel the Town will see roughly the same in the downtown "Gardens-to-Table Community Market" with its raised bed gardens. It will suffer in late summer months from folks of my lackadaisical disposition. And in most other seasons it will look even worse.

A vegetable garden (despite how as great and wonderful is during the summer) is no object of beauty in other seasons of the year. In short, an eyesore for most of the year.

Consider the newly renovated Thomson Tire building shown in the soon to come photos. This is an excellent example of a newly renovated property here in Pulaski. Buildings of this kind mesh with the character of the town and bring revitalization to it. Bringing buildings back to life is precisely what the town desperately needs. Thomson Tire was courageous to make the big commitment it did on what was otherwise a street on a downward slide. We need to strongly support such revitalization rather than punishing it by placing an eyesore across the street from it.

To Benefit the Town: The Chestnut Tree Park & its Peak Creek Connection.

Let's look at it. [The existing pedestrian bridge adjacent to the site is an absolutely brilliant idea and execution.](#) It is one of the the town's great underutilized assets. Now it can be used full force.



In the above photo on the left, you see an aerial view of the 25,100 sq ft. site before planting the American Chestnuts. An [offset cul-de-sac](#) and tree locations are sketched in above on the right.



On the above left, the photo shows the existing concrete plate extended to accommodate 18 parking spaces along the cul-de-sac edge. In a market atmosphere, the parking is for vendors (especially tail-gate vendors). The green cul-de-sac area is to be used for displaying wares and pedestrians meandering between vendors. Similarly the area can be used for other public purposes. The property boundary appears on the [county tax map](#) shown on the right above.

To make it a standout and attractive, the center cul-de-sac area (7,668 sq ft) is to be painted, for example, with “Scenic New England”, Glidden #10727 (about 25 gal. of paint). The success of painting concrete in public areas is a cheap and [proven success \(please watch this video\)](#), retail sales increasing 172%.

About 4,574 sq ft of new concrete surface is added to complete the parking area. Around this, 25 trees, predominantly American Chestnuts are planted (with perhaps 3 or 4 Poplar trees on the north side near the Peak Creek border, but not on the south side where they would shade the chestnuts). The trees are sketched with a 20 ft. canopy, which will be much larger when they mature. Some thinning then may be necessary.

To accompany the trees, low lying shrubs including rhododendron and hollies can be planted to provide winter color and attractive appearance while the American Chestnuts are still small. Thickly planted creeping red fescue between trees and elsewhere along the pedestrian walkways has a thematic and low-maintenance advantage: creeping red fescue rolls over before gaining height. Often it is more attractive when not mowed, especially near a forest-like tree cover.

The intention in the Chestnut Tree Park is to create a focal point that leads to other mini outdoor markets in the downtown between 1st and 3rd Streets. Between them, as you will soon see, there are a series of already existing walkways which can be spruced up to create a unified whole as will be shown in the overall map of the area. You will notice when you personally walk through the area now that there are many underutilized buildings. Once the pedestrian activity between these mini markets become active, these buildings too inevitably will become active and increasingly attractive for retail sales.

These same walkways exist to draw attention to Peak Creek. You may from time to time hear mention of promenades and Peak Creek loops. The chief difficulty with such concepts is that there are only a few points where there are continuous walkways along the creek.

If we want to show off the Creek, we will need to use other techniques. As you can see below, property along the creek is utilized in the main by various businesses and is absolutely blocked by several buildings, such as those marked in red.



This lack of continuity can be turned into an advantage by making the Chestnut Park bridge a pedestrian flow point for various mini markets and other events scattered between 1st and 3rd. More people on foot here is better for business. By taking advantage of this, this underutilized section of town becomes increasingly vibrant. Think Dublin, Hillsville, and Newbern events, markets/flea markets/yard sales, etc.

All of these natural regional activities draw huge crowds and rely on pedestrian foot traffic to bring success. One massive downtown yard sale and farmers market.

The following are photos of the area. On the left we have the newly renovated Thompson Tire Bldg. On the right we have the view from Peak Creek showing the concrete pad and Thompson Tire in the background.



In the following, we see the concrete pad when looking toward Peak Creek from 1st St. On the right we see the area to the west of the pad that will be extended in part for the cul-de-sac and in the remaining section will be cleared for planting the American Chestnuts.



On the left below we see the area to the west of the pad; on the right, the area to the east of the pad.



The photo below is a wide angle view of the site. The photo at the right shows the view looking west.



In the photos below we walk the bridge and in the second photo look east.



Below are views from the center of the bridge looking first east, then west.



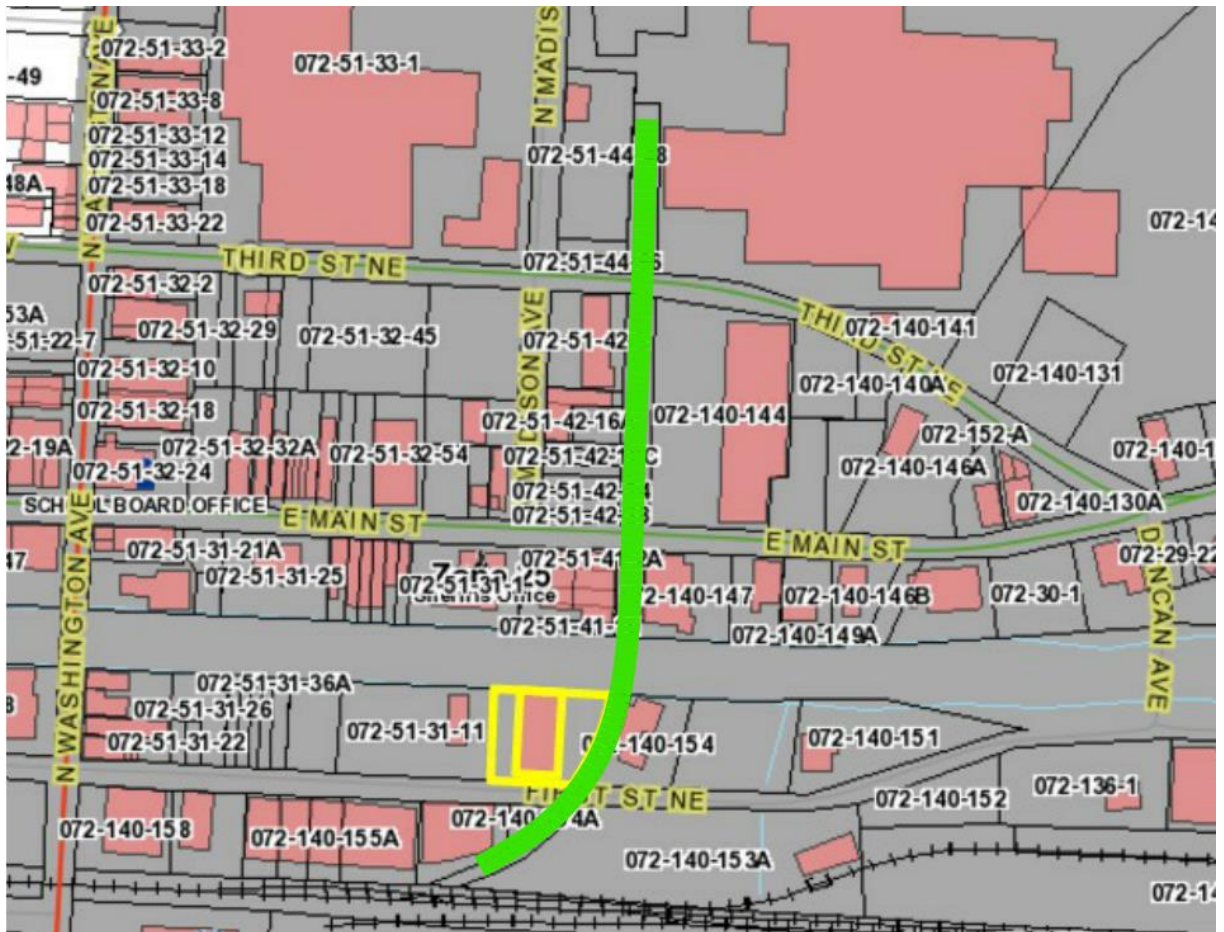
In the photos below, we look back first on the east side and then on the west side of the bridge.



Now we have reached the point where the Chestnut Tree Park and Peak Creek pedestrian bridge tie to the Industrial Walkway and mini-markets. This path is what is referred to here as the Industrial Walkway. Holly trees, rhododendron and plantings consistent with Chestnut Park would do nicely here.



Here we see the Walkway marked in green relative to other properties (shown in more detail on [GIS](#)).



The left hand photo below shows the southernmost leg of the Industrial Walkway at Thomson Tire. The next photo shows the Walkway crossing East Main.



In the photo below while on the Industrial Walkway looking west after crossing East Main, we see an ideal lot location for a mini market (e.g., flea market). On the right, the Walkway continues to 3rd St.



More of the Walkway below as we continue to 3rd St.



Here we look west and then east at the junction of the Walkway and 3rd. This portion of the Walkway can be made beautiful with creeping red fescue, hollies, flowers, and perhaps a few American Chestnuts.



The Industrial Walkway and primary pedestrian loops are shown below in green. The supportive secondary pedestrian loops are shown in grey. All of these lead to mini-market areas or areas beneficial to Peak Creek (marked on the map in dashed green lines). Together the marked areas total 146,950 sq. ft. By comparison, Dublin's Walmart is approximately a 140,000 sq. ft. store – roughly the same size. You can conduct a lot of business and get a great deal of attention when you put that much space into play.



On weekend sale dates that bring exceptionally high numbers of people, we can, as needed, close off one lane of both E. Main and 3rd for additional parking and vendors. Each of these, being wide two-lane, one-way roads, have ample capacity for handling weekend traffic on one lane alone for this short section.

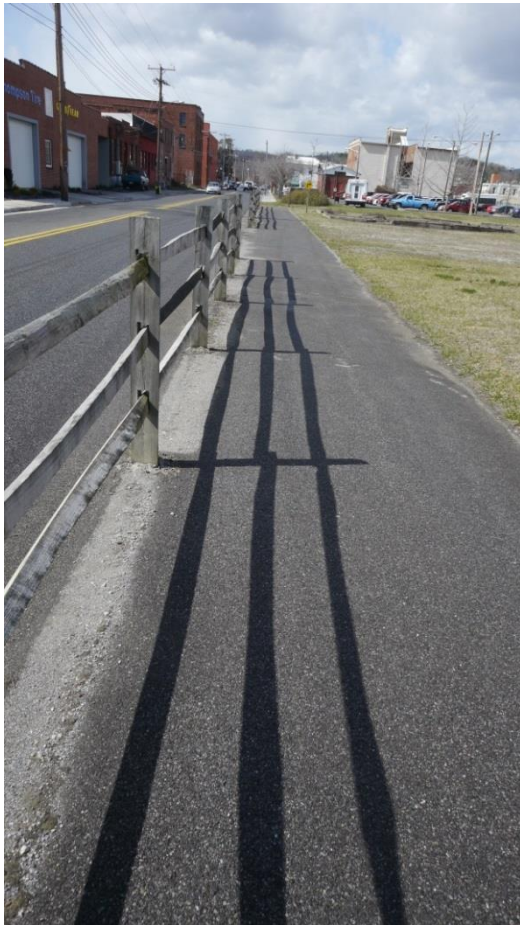


With a diligent effort and use agreements with various landowners, there are numerous other areas that be brought into play, as you can see here in the maps and, better yet, when you walk through the area. Property owners have much to gain. Many of sites here are now going to waste and ruin. Increased life around them and focus on this section of town will make property attractive and profitable for

landowners and businesses alike. The hard edge of reality is that the selling prices and tax base in this section of town is being killed by lack of activity here. They are strikingly low, as you can verify on the

[GIS](#). A proposal such as this has great payoff for the Town, its businesses, and its citizens. If we do not strike when the iron is hot, the downtown tax base will continue at low sub-warehouse values. Assessed valued at less than \$10 per sq. ft. are not uncommon – buildings selling at about the price of some rugs.

By putting spirit into it, the Town can build great outcomes. Benjamin Franklin stated the case in the negative when he said, “By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.” More positively, by preparing and setting the scene for success with the Chestnut Park, the Walkway, and the Markets, it is success that you will have – even if you don’t know in advance what form that success will take. In this case we have the advantage that success comes on the cheap by making merely small adjustments on which success can build.



Pedestrian Flow on 1st.

The 1st Street fence is an impediment to easy flow of pedestrians (especially in large numbers) in the Peak Creek region, at Mini-Markets, and at the Chestnut Park. If you walk enough in this area it becomes plain that although elsewhere it is easy to cross a street, on 1st Street different rules apply. Here it is a chore to be accomplished only with care and only at designated breaks in the fencing. It is surprisingly easy to become trapped between a car and fence when crossing the street here.

For cyclists on the road side of the fence it’s no better. One of the most chilling moments I have had cycling was when a truck towing a boat trailer passed me too closely and then cut in too early here. Being trapped between the trailer and fence was terrifying.

This is the kind of thing that causes visitors to scratch their heads and ask why anyone would build such a fence. No desirable ornamental or functional use is derived from it. It’s ugly. It serves no purpose. The posts need to be pulled out and the fencing used elsewhere, perhaps along the Industrial Walkway or at other park sites where they can have a useful purpose.



One of the objectives of this eastside development is to make walking along Peak Creek a congenial and nice experience. As you can see in the photo, this walkway occasionally comes close to the creek. Instead of the fence, green accent striping along walkway edges can give it an attractive and distinctive appearance.

The Better Choice.

The grant and its outcome is a tax base killer. It is a business killer. It ruins pedestrian opportunities throughout the eastside. It is environmentally destructive. It is ugly. It forecloses easy paths to economic development throughout this section of town. It takes \$240,000 out of our coffers that could have been productively used to bring success to the downtown. And, it fails to celebrate the industrial aspects of the town and the American Chestnuts that were a key in our ancestors' lives.

Worse yet once the impenetrable fabric liner is placed on the site in the purported "remediation" plan, the site is ruined forever for natural plant growth of the kind proposed here. Thompson Tire and any other businesses that renovate buildings on 1st Street will be plagued with an eyesore. The "remediation", directly and indirectly, is vastly destructive for the downtowns eastside.

The failure to apply with surgical precision success producing components at the core is the root of the difference between vast grant-driven expenditures and objectives that focus on inexpensive adjustments that together create paths to success within a community and within a normal market economy.

The highly influential military analyst [Andrew Marshall](#) and his protégé Paul Kaminski were partial to the expression, "Periods of great innovation almost always come in resource-poor periods." The reason that they are correct is that when you are driven to succeed and have only slight funds to work with, you factor out the peripheral and go for the core to produce results.

At this instant, beyond all else, we need those with the courage to make an extraordinary effort of killing the "remediation" plan and taking those urgent steps necessary to bring new life to the downtown. I urge you and beg you to have that courage. The Town will forever benefit from it.

Thank you.

-Ike