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Alh Construction Co., concrete sub-contractors from Elizabethton, pouring and finishing concrete along a section of the trail that will run from University Parkway to Earnest Street.

(Tony Duncan / Johnson City Press)

## Done by Blue Plum — Recreational trail on State of Franklin Road should be ready by downtown festival time

By Jeff Keeling  
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A three-quarter mile, grant-funded recreational trail along West State of Franklin Road should be ready in time for visitors to stroll it to the downtown Blue Plum Festival on June 4-6.

Workers from ALH Construction in Elizabethton began pouring concrete Wednesday on the first section, stretching from University Parkway to Watauga Avenue along the former CSX rail line.

Brandon Pachol, an engineer for the city, said main contractor East Tennessee Turf and Landscape, of Morristown, should have the entire project complete by sometime in June. Part of a series of walk/bikeways planned for various areas of the city, the 3,950-foot trail will be 10 feet wide, with landscaping along its entire length. Larger areas at the trail's east and west ends will feature heavier landscaping, seating areas and bike racks.

The "overstory" will feature London planetree and Nuttall oak. Other, smaller trees planted along the length of the trail will include varieties of magnolia, Golden Raintree, holly, cypress, redbud, hornbeam and crepe myrtle.

More than a dozen varieties of flowering and evergreen shrubs (roses and laurels among them) will greet walkers and riders at eye level and below, while several pullouts with benches are planned. Streetlamps in a historical theme will be placed along the trail, and will match a new corridor of streetlights along both sides of State of Franklin along the length of the trail. The Johnson City Power Board will install the main streetlights.

All told, the work will cost about \$850,000. \$592,111 of that is for the main contractor, while the remainder is for design engineering and construction oversight being done by Knoxville-based Barge, Waggoner, Sumner and Cannon.

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (stimulus) funds are covering \$400,000 of the expense. The other \$450,000 will be paid by a Tennessee Department of Transportation grant that the city has had access to for more than five years. That TDOT grant requires a 20 percent match, so the city has covered about \$90,000 of the total cost.

Eventually, the landscaping may not be the only visual attraction for trail users. The city has had some very preliminary discussions with officials and art faculty at East Tennessee State University about the possibility of establishing a "sculpture walk"



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along the trail, though many details would remain to be ironed out before that could be established.

The new trail is one of several planned for the area around downtown and ETSU. A trail on the opposite (north) side of State of Franklin is slated to begin at Watauga Avenue and stretch all the way to the Veterans Affairs entrance, following Brush Creek much of the way.

The city is constructing the section from University Parkway west to the VA, while ETSU and the company developing University Edge Apartments will complete the Watauga to University Parkway section.

The city also is using a "Safe Schools" grant to bring a trail from Cherokee Elementary along Lone Oak Road so students and families from area neighborhoods can reach the school more safely on foot or bicycle. City officials hope to eventually extend that trail to Antioch Road and on to Willow Springs Park, though completion is likely to be several years away.

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