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Joara Museum gets go-ahead

By Steve Welker

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Visitors to Catawba Meadows Park may be walking through replicas of 15th- and 16th century Native American houses within a few years.

The Morganton City Council on Monday gave unanimous and enthusiastic approval to the Explore Joara Foundation's plan to create a museum and interpretive site on an actual archaeological site at the park.

"History will be under their (visitors') feet," said David Moore, a member of the foundation's board of directors and director of the archaeology program at Warren Wilson College.

Describing the site as "a wonderful physical setup" and the proposed complex as "a unique facility," Moore said, "There are only a couple of places in North Carolina where a visitor can approach the experience we anticipate having here."

Moore for many years has led the archaeological investigation of the Berry site in Burke County, a property near Morganton where he and his team have found artifacts from both a Native American village called Joara and the first Spanish fort in the U.S. interior.

The site has attracted national attention.

Moore said one of visitors' most common questions is, "Do you plan to have a museum?"

The Berry site itself is not suitable for a museum, in part because it's privately owned, Moore said. But then the foundation became aware of the availability of an existing building at Catawba Meadows — the park office building.

The foundation proposes using about 2,300 square feet of the building for a museum.

When the city began developing Catawba Meadows Park, an archaeological survey also found an interesting site in the park, prompting planners to shift the location of ballfields. That left one to two acres open. Now, Moore said, the Explore Joara Foundation proposes using that location for an actual archaeological dig along with the interpretive village.

The foundation's plans call for opening the museum in 2011 and developing the Native American replica homes over the next few years at a total cost of \$259,000 to \$319,000.

Moore said much of the expense will be reduced by using volunteers to build the replica houses, just as happened at the Museum of the Cherokee Indians.

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<http://www2.morganton.com/member...>

Moore said he also hopes the foundation's project at Catawba Meadows Park will become one of the hubs for a statewide "archaeological trail" now in the early stages of development.

The city council voted to give city staff the go-ahead to work with the foundation on the project.

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