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CONTACT:

Explore Bristol

E-Mail: info@explorebristol.com

Phone: [\(423\) 212-3637](tel:423-212-3637)

EXPLORE BRISTOL UNVEILS PLANS FOR NEW VISITOR CENTER

BRISTOL, Tenn. – Explore Bristol unveiled plans today for the construction of a new visitor center along the Volunteer Parkway, just south of the Tennessee-Virginia border. Pete Rosenboro, Bristol native and Assistant Commissioner of Welcome Centers for the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development, joined Explore Bristol staff and members of its board of directors to announce details of this first-of-its-kind facility.

“Tourism drives economic development and job creation so that every Tennessean can thrive. We are excited to see the tremendous growth in tourism spending in Bristol and the Northeast Tennessee region as a whole,” noted Rosenboro. “Today’s announcement of the Explore Bristol visitor center will elevate and engage visitors traveling to the region.”

The center will be located near the Parkway’s intersection with Anderson Street at the trailhead of the Wes Davis Greenway. In addition to serving as Explore Bristol’s primary office location, the 2,046-square-foot facility will feature ample display space for information on local and regional tourism assets, as well as the potential for interactive visitor exhibits. Flexible indoor and outdoor space will also be able to accommodate small meetings and music events. Like the Pullman car and caboose that currently sit on the site, both of which will remain and be incorporated in the center’s offerings, the interior and exterior architectural features of the facility have been designed to acknowledge Bristol’s extensive railroad heritage. The addition of a parking lot and updated lighting will also enhance the area for users of the roughly half-mile greenway currently emanating from the site.

Tourism industry representatives from throughout Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia were in attendance for Thursday’s announcement. While Bristol area attractions will naturally be highlighted, the center is envisioned to position Bristol as a starting point for visitors to begin their exploration of the greater region. “Among the most common feedback we hear from visitors to the area is that there is so much to do, it’s often difficult to know where to begin,” said Alicia Phelps, Executive Director of the Northeast Tennessee Tourism Association. “Explore Bristol, like our other partners, are such great champions not only of the respective communities they serve, but of our region as a whole. This center will help amplify that voice by showcasing these offerings in such a way that our guests will be just as excited about exploring whether it’s their first time in Bristol or their fiftieth.”

Explore Bristol Executive Director Matt Bolas envisions a visitor experience that remains true to Bristol’s roots. “Bristol has developed a reputation for two things over the years when it comes to tourism: the

almost overwhelming number of world-class attractions and experiences available right in our backyard, and a signature brand of hospitality that you truly won't find anywhere else on the planet." He added, "We're thrilled to finally be able to encapsulate that full, genuine Bristol experience and put it proudly on display as soon as folks walk through the center's doors in a way that hasn't been seen before."

Leah Ross, chair of the Explore Bristol board of directors, agrees. "Having a place so beautiful and so 'Bristol' to welcome visitors has been a long time coming," she said. "We have no doubt that our out-of-town guests will enjoy immersing themselves with all of the offerings of Bristol and the region, and create an experience that will make even long-time residents and industry partners feel the excitement of arriving in Bristol for the first time."

Construction bids are currently being accepted for the project with site preparation anticipated to begin in early spring 2023. For more information, please contact Explore Bristol at info@explorebristol.com.

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Formed in 2021, Explore Bristol is an independent 501(C)(6) nonprofit serving as the official destination marketing organization of Bristol, Tennessee and surrounding region. Explore Bristol seeks to promote increase tourism in Bristol and the surrounding region through innovative strategies and collaboration. Stay connected online at explorebristol.com and on [Facebook](#) and Instagram [@explorebristolnow](#)