



NEWS RELEASE

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‘Historic Bottoms’ past and future featured in ‘Murfreesboro Storytellers’

Former ‘Bottoms’ Resident, Archivist, Planner, Discuss Origins, Industrial History, Future

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. – Murfreesboro’s “Historic Bottoms,” with a past known for low terrain and flooding, dates to the Civil War and Reconstruction. It was a place where many former slaves resided after gaining freedom and where African Americans made a community even as a federal highway, U.S. 41, cut its way through the City.

In 2016, the City of Murfreesboro and Ragan-Smith Associates initiated a year-long planning study to revitalize the area. The Bottoms is generally considered south of the Historic Downtown Square, east along Southeast Broad Street to the Discovery Center, west along Southeast Broad Street to Memorial Boulevard (formerly West Main St.) and to the CSX railroad as the western boundary. The study looked at the area bounded by Old Fort Parkway on the north, Broad Street on the east, the Discovery Center on the south and the CSX railroad on the west.

In March 2017, the Murfreesboro Planning Commission approved the study calling for the Bottoms area to become an arts and entertainment district with mixed-use development and an amphitheater as a destination point for visitors. As part of the plan, connecting the downtown Square to Cannonsburgh would include a pedestrian bridge and pathways along a “daylighted” Town Creek between the Discovery Center, Cannonsburgh, Lytle Creek and the Greenway. Town Creek was placed into underground culverts during urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s.

In the April episode of “Murfreesboro Storytellers,” lifelong Murfreesboro resident Gracie Turner, Rutherford County Archives Director John Lodl, and City of Murfreesboro Principal Planner Donald Anthony discuss the area’s past and future. Watch the episode on YouTube at https://youtu.be/B9iQ_bd7PUl or on CityTV.

The “Storytellers” interview features the following topics and issues:

- Rutherford County Archives Director **John Lodl**, who studied the Bottoms, illustrates the origins of the area dating back to the Civil War. Following the war, former slaves moved into the Bottoms and established a community of homes, businesses and churches. By the start of the mid-1900’s, the demographics changed due to its location near the railroad and access to

various lumber and cotton industries. Whites, who were also trying to eke out a living, moved into the area for work.

- Lodi addresses the national trend of **urban renewal** in the 1950s and 1960s that provided federal funding to help clean-up plighted areas of America. Residents were relocated into new “project housing” such as Franklin Heights. Broad Street, or U.S. 41, cut a barrier of sorts through downtown.
- Lodi is encouraged by the way planners have incorporated Murfreesboro’s history, heritage and the arts as a **new vision** for historic downtown to attract tourism. Murfreesboro has one of only six historic pre-Civil War courthouses still standing in Tennessee.
- Lifelong Murfreesboro resident **Gracie Turner** lived in the Bottoms as a child and attended Bradley School, now an African American museum. Turner recalls times Town Creek and Lytle Creek often flooding, forcing her family to move to higher ground. The deepest flooding occurred at the intersection of State and Walnut Streets. Her family would relocate to her grandmother’s home on Front and Vine Streets.
- Turner’s father worked at a lumber yard in the Bottoms but she also remembers grocery stores, working in shared gardens, and corner meals of corn on the cobb. She also recalls attending Mt. Zion Primitive Baptist Church on a hill on State Street.
- City Principal Planner **Donald Anthony** discusses the ‘Historic Bottoms’ planning study and the importance of community input from three public events. The draft study has taken a year to develop and was approved by the Planning Commission on March 22. The City Council will review the study at a **Special Meeting April 13**.
- One of the recommendations of the study was to “daylight” or unearth **Town Creek** which flows from Murfree Spring along Hickerson Drive into Cannonsburgh. The Town Creek Phase 1 project is already underway. Anthony discusses how at-grade crossings on Broad Street will likely be needed to supplement any pedestrian bridge.
- Anthony addresses the 5 to 10 year “**implementation stage**” of the Bottoms study which includes considerations for zoning, economic development, and high density, mixed-use housing. The next step of the long-range vision is reviewing existing industrial and commercial zoning with the possibility of a **design overlay** to regulate future development and walkability in the area.

This month’s “Storytellers” was recorded in the Murfreesboro City Council Chambers at 111 West Vine Street in Murfreesboro. “Murfreesboro Storytellers” is hosted by John Hood and produced by award-winning video producer Michael Nevills.

“Storytellers” can also be seen on CityTV Sunday, 9:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m.; Monday, 7:30 p.m., Tuesday and Thursday, 9:30 a.m. and Saturday, 9:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. You can watch “Storytellers” on CityTV (located on Comcast Xfinity Channel 3 and AT&T Uverse channel 99), on Roku, or simply view the program online by visiting www.murfreesborotn.gov/storytellers.

For City News online, visit www.Murfreesborotn.gov.

Photos attached: Courtesy of Shacklett’s Photography Collection at the Rutherford County Archives.

1. *Historic Bottoms 1.jpeg.*
2. *Historic Bottoms 2.jpeg.*
3. *Historic Bottoms 3.jpeg.*
4. *Historic Bottoms Rendition.jpeg.*