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Greenway project on its way to Iredell

By [Megan Pillow](#) | Mooresville Tribune

Like many greenway advocates, Mooresville Commissioner Mac Herring is looking forward to the day when area residents have some alternatives to walking or driving down the region's many busy roads.

"(The greenways will) be great for scout groups, for people who are looking for opportunities to get outdoors," he said. "Hopefully it will get the community more engaged in the local ecology."

Executing that concept locally may not be too far off: Mooresville already has bicycle, transportation and pedestrian plans that include the addition of greenways - of trails typically used for walking, bicycling or other activities.

And the Iredell County planning staff is also working on a new master plan that will likely include those elements. But bringing that vision to life on a larger scale is now also in the works.

Mooresville commissioners recently heard from Ann Browning, project director for the Charlotte-based Carolina Thread Trail, about what it would take to make Mooresville and the rest of Iredell County part of a larger effort to construct and connect greenways across a 15-county region.

Browning, who will take the Thread Trail concept to Iredell County commissioners at a meeting on Sept. 16 and later to the Statesville City Council, said the idea behind the project is to "accelerate some existing trails and inspire some new ones."

According to its Web site, the Carolina Thread Trail will be a "green interstate system" that will connect 2 million people across its 15-county reach.

The project, said the site, will result in "more than a hiking trail, more than a bike path, the Carolina Thread Trail will preserve our natural areas and will be a place for exploration of nature, culture, science and history, for family adventures and celebrations of friendship."

According to the site, the name for the project "was inspired by a region with a rich heritage of weaving fabric. This intricate network of trails will weave together people, communities and nature into a tapestry that connects Carolinians for generations to come."

In practical terms, said Browning, the project will provide technical support and resources to help communities plan, design and build their trails and connect them to one another. The project will hold a series of trail forums beginning in November to inform communities about its goals and to help with its fundraising campaign.

Its cash goal is \$25 million, Browning said, and the project has already received commitments for \$15 million. It has also secured a multi-year grant for \$25 million from the Clean Water Management Trust Fund and has received \$3 million of that grant this year.

"This is really inspiring some interest in the donor community," Browning said.

Mooresville Transportation Planner Chris Bauer said the project is one that Mooresville hopes to get in on.

"I'm really excited about it," he said. "I think it works really well with the plans we already have in place."

Mooresville has three potential candidates that could be part of the thread trail. Making it happen, however, depends on getting Iredell County officials and perhaps Statesville officials involved, he said.

"There's a little bit of coordination that has to go on," he said.

Steve Warren, the assistant director of Iredell County Planning and Development, said that right now only county staff is familiar with the project, but that is will soon make its way to county commissioners.

"Iredell at this stage is in the examination of (the project) only," he said. "We're taking a preliminary look at it. But that timing of it couldn't be better from the staff point because this would tie in nicely to other long-range planning," Warren said, referring to the county's master plan, which is currently in the works.

Still, Warren said planning staff are not sure what commissioners will think of the proposal.

"We're hoping (the commissioners) will give it a positive reception, but we don't know exactly what their views are on having a regional program of this nature," he said.

Although Mooresville officials have yet to sign off on the project, some like Herring, think the project and its goals have merit.

"This is a good group," said Mooresville Commissioner Mitch Abraham. Mooresville's plan for the greenways "fits right in."

Browning said the project's biggest hurdle is the acquisition of land. But some say that, in certain cases, land won't be the problem.

Yvonne Hart of the Mooresville Mill Village Revitalization Committee said her organization is already planning to put in its own nature trail that it hopes to hook up with the Carolina Thread Trail in the future.

The trail, she said, will stretch for approximately one mile through the Mill Village neighborhood and along land that the town already has an easement on because it runs along a sewer line.

Adding a nature trail to this already existing stretch of land, Hart said, will be a great first step in the thread trail process and will increase home values in the neighborhood.

But the biggest hurdle here, she said, isn't getting the land. Like many projects taken on by government, it's actually getting the project done.

"We want our trail to be the first," she said. Acquiring land for other sections, she said, "is all fine and dandy, but at some point you have to actually start building something."

Once the Mill Village trail is done, the thread trail, which is a much larger, more time-intensive project, can connect to it. In the meantime, Mooresville won't have to wait for it.

"We don't want land to be the excuse for not building the greenway," Hart said. "We are goign to find a way to make this happen."

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