



15-County Carolina Thread Trail Gets A Tentative OK From Lincoln County



Weaving Communities Together

By Ken H. Fortenberry

A plan to build a 15-county, 500-mile regional network of trails and greenways, including segments in Lincoln County, ran into a snag Monday night with county commissioners.

Although local governments will decide the locations of the Carolina Thread Trail in their jurisdictions, a proposal indicates a segment of the trail will weave along Lake Norman in the Denver area and also in Lincolnton.

"In both my public and private life, very few things have excited me like the Carolina Thread Trail," State Rep.-elect Johnathan Rhyne told commissioners. The Rhyne family has set aside land near Lincolnton for the trail.

"This is definitely a quality of life project," Rhyne said, urging commissioners to pass a resolution in support of the project.

The trail would cost an estimated \$150 million, with \$40 million coming from the private sector (\$16.7 million has already been raised) and the remaining \$110 million from government grants and from local, state and federal funds.

Commissioner Bruce Carlton raised concerns about not only the cost of the project, but also about the property rights of citizens who would live along the trail.

While Carlton said he was in favor of the concept, he didn't want the board to commit itself to spending money on a project that was not yet finalized and with lingering questions.

"The cost scares me," he told his colleagues, noting that the maintenance on the trails would be an issue.

He also noted that residents of a subdivision in Mecklenburg County are up in arms because the trail is supposed to weave through their neighborhood.

"I don't know if a trail in a backyard is a selling point or not," he said.

Carlton said that some people might not like a "sneaker freeway" in their backyards, particularly when they bought their homes with no expectation for that kind of land use near their property.

Commissioner Alex Patton said he agreed with Carlton and didn't want to endorse a project that might "take peoples' property from them to do it."

Commissioners were not being asked Monday night to spend any money, but to pass a resolution supporting the idea.

The wording of the resolution also concerned Carlton, who suggested that the way it was written it might be committing the board or future boards to coming up with the money to build the trail. Commissioner Marie Moore urged commissioners to approve the resolution, noting that they would only be agreeing to the concept so the plan could continue to be developed.

After County Manager George Wood suggested some word changes in the resolution stating that the county is not making a financial commitment at this time, commissioners voted unanimously to endorse the trail idea, but Carlton had the final word: "I suggest we wade into this pool, not dive into it."

The Carolina Thread Trail will be among the topics on the agenda for the Thursday, March 27 meeting of the East Lincoln Betterment Association. The meeting, which is open to the

public, begins at 7 p.m. at Unity Presbyterian Church on Unity Church Road.

Drought Update

County Public Works Director Steve Gilbert told commissioners that although the county is no longer in an “exceptional” drought, he doesn’t anticipate that water restrictions will ease anytime soon.

“We’re improving, but we’re still in worse shape than we were a year ago,” he said. While recent rainfall has improved streamflows and groundwater, rainfall is still down substantially in the past year.

“Relaxing water restrictions at this point is premature. . . the drought continues,” he said. “We are in a positive trend right now,” but the county is still behind in rainfall.

Zoning Matters

Commissioners approved a change in the subdivision ordinance that adds 13 roads to list of those where new subdivisions will face additional requirements for road access including such measures as restricted driveway cuts or collector roads. Most of the roads are in East Lincoln.

In other matters, commissioners:

* Learned that a lawsuit appeal filed by Denver resident Martin Oakes against the county and the school board has been turned down by the Supreme Court. Oakes challenged the way the school board is elected.

* Went into closed session for a real estate matter.

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