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Thread trail committee selecting Lancaster County sites

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INDIAN LAND -- This month, members of the Carolina Thread Trail committee in Lancaster County will begin the process of selecting sites for a trail system that one day will encompass the entire county.

The trails will one day be part of the Carolina Thread Trail system, a regional network of greenways, trails and conserved land that will eventually wind its way through York, Chester, Lancaster and Cherokee counties in South Carolina, as well as 11 counties in North Carolina, and will intersect Fort Mill. The system, in the works since 2004 and implemented in phases, aims to connect approximately 2.3 million people to cities, towns, attractions and natural areas across a 7,300 square-mile area.

The Lancaster County committee, made up of 12 residents from around the county, will help decide which historic sites in Lancaster County should be included in the trail system. They are also charged with deciding where the trails will be placed throughout the county.

The group won't be making the big decisions alone. Thanks to a grant from Foundation for the Carolinas, a consultant will be hired to help the committee make decisions and public input will also be sought.

"We would think Andrew Jackson State park, Buford battleground, Landsford Canal, the greenway that goes through the City of Lancaster, those would probably be spots, but there is nothing set in stone either," said Lancaster County Planning Director Chris Karres.

Karres said it will take the committee about a year to decide the footprint of the Lancaster County thread trail. After that, it's just a matter of getting financing to build the trail system. Some grant funding is available, he added, but Karres hopes that developers around Lancaster County will also donate land.

The good news, he added, is that there is no hurry to get the trail complete and it can be done piecemeal, as land and funding are available.

"We are wondering where funding will come from and hoping that at least some of the trails will be in locations that will be developed by a developer for housing or commercial purposes," Karres said. "And that they would be willing to put up some of the expense. The idea is to get the plan in place and there is no real time frame to put [the trails] in. We hope over a few years to get it done. There is no real time frame."

No one will be required to give up private land for the trails, Karres said, although donations would be accepted.

Committee member Jane Massey, a Van Wyck resident, said she is excited about serving on the committee and the possibilities that the thread trail could bring. She hopes to eventually have a trail system that connects Lancaster County with places as far away as the mountains and the beaches.

She points out that the county currently has no formal trail system. Green space exists throughout the county, but few have trails.

“With so much property being private and posted, and with the growth, people no longer live in farms, just these little houses where they can shake their neighbors hand by reaching out their window,” Massey said. “There is nowhere to go. We need these [trails].”

The committee will meet for the first time on March 22. Members hope to have the first public meeting in three to four months.

<http://www.fortmilltimes.com/2010/03/12/1031549/thread-trail-committee-selecting.html>