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Meetings allow residents to choose Thread Trail locations

by Jordan-Ashley Baker

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Catawba County residents discussed the qualities they want in the Carolina Thread Trail during a public forum at the Newton Depot Tuesday.

The project is a network of trails throughout 15 counties in North and South Carolina.

‘Think of it as an interstate,’ said Randi Gates, Carolina Thread Trail community coordinator.

Gates said the trail will connect points of interest in Catawba County to trails in surrounding counties.

Once completed, the trail will link more than two million residents.

The trails’ locations are left to county residents to decide.

‘We want to hear from you,’ said Mary George, a planner for Catawba County.

Participants at the public forum were given maps of the county to sketch where they wanted to see trails and which locations they wanted to connect.

‘There are many ways to get from point A to point B,’ Gates said.

Ira Cline and his wife, Ann, marked on the map where they didn’t want to see the trails. The Clines are farmers, and they don’t want the trails to run through their land.

‘(The trails) could do a lot of harm,’ Ann said.

Ira said the trails could damage farmland.

‘If these trails aren’t placed right, these trails could be detrimental to agriculture,’ he said.

Many people ask if the thread trail project has the power of eminent domain, Gates said.

Carolina Thread Trail has no authority to assert eminent domain over private land. Use of private land is by invite only, Gates said.

The Carolina Thread Trail is a local nonprofit organization. The project is funded through private and federal, state and local funds.

County residents decide what kind of trails will be placed in their area.

Sue Ballbach attended the forum because she is excited about the prospect of the thread trail in Catawba County.

"The trail will improve our quality of life," she said.

Participants were given comment forms to weigh in on what types of trails they want, which cities they want the trails to connect and how they want to use the trails.

All forms will be read and all comments considered, Gates said.

Trails can be used for walking, hiking, cycling, rollerblading, biking, horseback riding and many other activities.

The trails' activities determine the type of trail surface used. Potential trail surfaces are asphalt, gravel and compacted earth.

Gates said a network of trails provides many services for the county, including land conservation, better air and water quality and increased health for residents.

The trails make it easier for residents to exercise, resulting in a healthier population, Gates said.

A master thread trail plan will be developed based on community needs. Local and county governments then choose to adopt or amend the master plan.

For more information about the Carolina Thread Trail, visit the trail's Web site, www.carolinathreadtrail.org or attend the final public forum Thursday from 6-8 p.m. at Highland Recreation Center in Hickory.

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