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YOU'VE GOT TO WORK A BIT TO ENJOY WALKING'S BENEFITS

A path, a purpose

County needs to make strides with sidewalks, greenways

CLIFF HARRINGTON

IN MY OPINION

If you simply want to go for a leisurely walk, there are plenty of places in Union County.

However, if you're looking for a way to make walking a useful part of your life, you'd better look carefully at where you buy a house. There aren't many places where you can safely walk to restaurants, grocery stores or places for entertainment.

I'm an advocate of walking. It's healthy and pollution free.

Walking was the mass transit of my youth. My friends and I would meet at a designated point and walk together to our planned destination.

In rural Richmond County, there were no sidewalks or greenways.

The proposed Carolina Thread Trail is a good idea. Recently proposed by a group of nonprofits, it would be a 400-mile greenway that would meander through 15 counties, including Union. It would provide exercise and help connect us without the use of motorized transportation.

And with gas prices the way they are, wouldn't we all like to drive less?

The greenway would be one way of tying Union County together with safe, walkable routes.

Another piece would be more sidewalks that connect destinations.

You'll find sidewalks in many subdivisions and near businesses around Union County. They're there to serve a specific area, not connect you to someplace else. So they serve a limited function.

However, I have recently found some sidewalks that can be woven into one's life. One stretches from Potters Road to Waxhaw-Indian Trail Road, along Old Monroe Road in Stallings.

The sidewalk allows people in nearby subdivisions to walk to grocery stores, restaurants or rent a movie.

That's similar to the sidewalk near Sun Valley High School. You can walk to the middle school or grocery store or enjoy a walk through Brandon Oaks neighborhood. However, that sidewalk does not connect to other subdivisions down Wesley Chapel Road. And as you travel along that road, you'll find some subdivisions with sidewalks and others without. But they're not tied to each other.

Also, there's a beautiful stretch of sidewalk that goes along Stevens Mill Road, starting at the Fairfield Plantation neighborhood. It extends to Stevens Crossing Shopping Center at Lawyer's Road. People lucky enough to be within that stretch can walk to get groceries, or the drugstore or restaurants.

That sidewalk also ends abruptly, leaving other nearby subdivisions disconnected.

I understand sidewalks and greenways are complex, expensive tasks. It means you must get people to grant rights of way across their property. That's a tough sell in some places. Then you've got to get people, town governments and county governments to pay. That's even tougher.

Many residents say they want greenways. And I hear people frequently talking about their desire for sidewalks. Both amenities give people a safe way to connect with their surroundings.

We don't have enough sidewalks and greenways for walking to be a big part of our lives. And it's not safe to walk along many roads; they're narrow, curvy and carrying a host of cars moving too fast.

So, when we hear people talking about greenways and sidewalks, there's a more obvious question we must answer. Do we want to simply go for a walk? Or, are we willing to do what it'll take to make walking a useful part of our lives?

IN MY OPINION

What can you do?

If you're interested in sidewalks, call your local government officials. If you want to support the Carolina Thread Trail, or get more information about it, call Ann Browning 704-376-2714 or visit www.carolinathreadtrail.org. Cliff

Harrington

<http://www.charlotte.com/union/story/393304.html>