

IN MY OPINION | JAMES COOK

Carolina Thread Trail naysayers see things in very narrow prism

Don't miss full value of this phenomenal project

I was infuriated after reading about the indecisiveness and negative philosophy expressed by some in "Trail project in holding pattern" as published by The Charlotte Observer on Jan. 31.

The uproar by magnet school participants aside, I am befuddled by the reluctance and narrow-minded views restraining this phenomenal and one-of-a-kind visionary trail. I do hope the passage of time has allowed a more reasonable understanding of the full value of this system of greenways.

Gaston County should be thankful and honored for selection as one of two pilot counties to initiate planning for the Carolina Thread Trail. Yet, the strategic importance and intricate design of this project was relegated to an elementary classification of "drug corridors" by one citizen. This absurd qualification might as well be applied to the miles of sewer line right-of-ways, utility transmission lines, public roads, or any other path that leads from one property to another.

These forms of infrastructure have the same intrinsic risk and reward balance that exists in a thought-out system of greenways linking interesting features in the landscape.

As with any municipal-private venture, finances are paramount. However, has anyone truly evaluated the total costs that we currently fund in terms of health, safety, transportation, environmental, economical and societal impacts by failing to provide adequate alternatives and resources that enable people to connect, explore, experience, exercise, and marvel at the Piedmont's natural beauty?

We constantly hear stories about the rising costs of health care while obesity, diabetes and heart disease rates continue to escalate in Gaston County. For those courageous enough, like myself, to run alongside speeding traffic or pedal next to a several-thousand-pound vehicle, we utilize the facilities available at a tremendous hazard.

I cringe at the news of another pedestrian, runner or cyclist who succumbs to these dangers lurking each day on public roadways in North Carolina. The availability of designated recreational pathways meandering from one point to another is highly attractive and the ideal setting to conduct fitness and promote quality of life.

Unfortunately, I believe the attitudes displayed by certain Gaston County municipalities and their citizens who stand in opposition to this unique regional trail network are exactly why Gaston County is perceived as backward by many people east of the Catawba River and likely the reason it has been the last locale to realize residential and industrial growth emanating from Charlotte's heartbeat.

Whereas the pace of development simultaneously erodes the very landscape that inspires so many people to relocate to the South. Further delay in fostering this project is unacceptable. The chance to create history is now. Laying the groundwork to establish a series of trails will facilitate the preservation of the most recognized and attractive destinations in our county.

Thanks to commissioner (Joe) Carpenter and others who espoused their support and enthusiasm for the Carolina Thread Trail and offered some foresight necessary to tackle this bold idea.

I hope you, too, embrace the gravity of this situation and help usher in a spectacular jewel for Gaston County.

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