



Cramerton blazes new trail with support of greenway system

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Cramerton became the first community to adopt a master plan for a 15-county greenway system this month.

Town commissioners approved an outline for developing the Carolina Thread Trail - a conceptual network of walking and biking paths around the Charlotte region.

Cramerton has agreed to integrate its existing and proposed municipal greenways with trail segments that are developed outside town limits. It marks the town's willingness to link up with a larger regional greenway system, said Town Manager Michael Peoples.

"It's a map of what can happen, which can change. It's a fluid document," he said. "Basically it means the town board sees the thread trail as a good thing for the entire town."

The non-profit Catawba Lands Conservancy envisions the Carolina Thread Trail as a means of expanding transportation and recreation options in the region. It is encouraging towns, cities and counties to buy into the concept by using grants and other funding sources to build up the web of trails.

"To build a regional network of this scope, it will take many communities acting locally, but in a coordinated fashion," said Ann Browning, Carolina Thread Trail project director.

Gaston County commissioners approved a resolution supporting the thread trail concept a year ago, but also promised no greenways will be forced on unwilling property owners. Opponents fear a large greenway system will spur a loss of property rights and privacy, create crime corridors and drain tax dollars for upkeep of the trails.

Gaston County has yet to approve the thread trail master plan.

In Cramerton, home to 3,353 people, there are no such concerns, Peoples said. The town has been active in developing its own greenway system since the 1990s.

"The thread trail is more of a supplement to what we've already done, just on a larger level," he said.

Gaston County and York County, S.C., each received \$50,000 grants a year ago to pilot the thread trail project. The money is providing funding and resources to create the thread trail blueprint.

Cramerton is fortunate to have a lot of undeveloped property along the South Fork River, Peoples said. Developers seeking to build in those areas have been enthusiastic about building trail sections as an added amenity to their projects.

"It's a great project," he said of the thread trail. "I hope everybody can get on board. It depends on how interested individual communities are in making it happen."

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http://www.gastongazette.com/news/trail_29782_article.html/thread_town.html