

Citizens speak out on thread trail plan

by: Sarah Melton and Frank Taylor
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Some people spoke out in favor of the proposed Carolina Thread Trail master plan, while others disagreed at a public hearing conducted by the Lincoln County commissioners and Planning Board on Monday night.

However, only supporters showed up for a city public hearing on the master plan on Thursday and City Council members voted unanimously to approve it.

County leaders will have a little longer to decide.

The regional Thread Trail is a network of greenways and trails that will reach 15 counties and 2.3 million people. Lincoln's 89-mile greenway network will include about two miles of existing trails and incorporate many trails that were already proposed in Lincoln's 2002 Greenway Master Plan.

Seven segments of the Lincoln plan have been defined as top priorities for the Thread Trail, meaning they could be developed within five to 10 years. The entire project, totaling between \$100 and \$150 million, would take 20 to 30 years to develop. Funding would come from a combination of private, state and federal funds.

Among those with doubts Monday were Mary and Ervin Grigg, who shared concerns about the trail running near their property on Reepsville Road in Vale. They don't want greenways cutting through their pastures or outsiders trespassing on their property. Building the trail might increase crime, particularly burglaries, Mary Grigg said.

"They are talking about taking away our privacy," she said.

Debbie Phillips, another Reepsville Road resident, suggested running the trail along N.C. 27 if it had to go through western Lincoln County. Some areas along Reepsville Road flood badly and the foot traffic might scare off deer, she said.

Also, Phillips worried her property taxes might increase for a trail that could leave her "waking up to noise at all hours of the night."

Another Reepsville Road resident, Hardy Hardison, witnessed crime problems when he lived near a greenway in Charlotte. "It's a glorified sidewalk," he said.

Thread Trail staff want to work with landowners, through voluntary participation, to secure right-of-way public access and use for the greenway system. But staff can accommodate landowners that do not want their property included in the plans.

Project consultant Greenways Inc. president Charles Flink said incidents of crime have been reported on other trails, but generally, statistics show that less criminal activity takes place in areas with trails than other land uses, such as shopping malls.

Also, environmental design elements are used on the trail to discourage crime and give access to police and emergency services, he said.

Others spoke in favor of the trail. Craig Wyant noted that it would encourage tourism, protect open spaces and provide access to the area's historic resources.

Ben Benoit, of the Lake Norman Covekeepers, said his organization endorsed the Thread Trail, adding "trails are not for us, but for the future."

Ray Holmes, another supporter, said the trail would not be forced on Reepsville Road residents if they did not want it.

N.C. Rep. Johnathan Rhyne Jr. has been working with the Legislature on the Thread Trail for years. He invited people to visit an existing trail along South Fork River, for which his family donated land. People who use that trail are respectful and do not generate the problems residents worried about, he assured commissioners.

After the public hearing, Planning Board members gave their approval to the Carolina Thread Trail, with the understanding that Lincoln County does not plan on using eminent domain to acquire the land.

To see the complete Carolina Thread Trail plan for Lincoln County, including a map, visit www.carolinathreadtrail.org.

County Commissioners will vote on the plan Nov. 16.

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