



West Lincoln Residents Object to Walking, Bike Trail Network Across the County

By Ken H. Fortenberry

Wednesday, November 04, 2009

A long-term project to develop connecting walking and biking trails throughout Lincoln County ran head-on into opposition from west Lincoln residents Monday night who claimed the plan would rob them of their land, lead to increased crime and would be nothing more than "glorified sidewalks."

The Lincoln County trails would be a part of a 15-county regional network of greenways and trails called the Carolina Thread Trail that would link counties in both Carolinas. Lincoln County would have 88.1 miles of trails that would connect libraries, parks, historic sites and other areas across the county. Several trails proposed for East Lincoln would link the community center with Beatty's Ford Park and Sally's Y, and into Mecklenburg County with the Mountain Island State Educational Forest in Mecklenburg County.

Despite assurances from trail supporters and county leaders that no property would be condemned or seized to make way for the trails, opponents claimed the plan would deprive them of their property.

"We don't want it and we don't need it," said Mary Grigg of Reesville Road in west Lincoln.

She was one of a number of Reepsville Road residents who objected to the plan during the county's public hearing.

Grigg said the plan would divide her pastures and take away her privacy. She said she can't keep her gates shut now with people trespassing on her property, and a network of trails would only make the situation worse.

"We have enough problems now," she said, encouraging the county to feed the people who are losing their unemployment benefits instead of developing a trail network.

Reepsville Road resident Debbie Phillips said the trails would increase crime and littering and create "noise at ungody hours" from walkers and bikers.

She said that the trails would become a haven for drug dealers and rapists, and "run off our deer."

Another Reepsville Road resident said the trails would be used by "undesirables" and would infringe on property rights.

Former state Rep. Joe Kiser said that although his name appears on some Carolina Thread Trail literature he has never attended a single meeting and is opposed to the idea.

He said that a trail proposed for west Lincoln would "go nowhere" because the people don't want it.

Kiser said that despite what trail supporters said to the contrary, he is afraid that property would be condemned for the project. He warned county commissioners that citizen objection to the plan would dwarf what they saw during a public hearing on the Unified Development Ordinance if they went ahead with it. A hearing on the UDO last year was attended by hundreds of angry, boisterous residents who vowed to defeat commissioners if they approved the UDO.

The trail plan had its supporters, too, and one of them said that if West Lincoln didn't want a trail it would not be forced to have one.

Raymond Holmes of Denver said that trail supporters were adamant that no one's land would be taken from them in order to make way for a trail and there would be "no attempt to try to force it (a trail) in any area where citizens don't want it."

That was reinforced by statements from Randi Gates of Carolina Thread Trail and Chuck Fink of Greenways, Inc., the trail's professional consultant.

"We're trying to do something friendly," said Fink, who said that planners are encouraged to work with property owners to sell their land for the benefit of the community or to donate the land and gain tax advantages.

Trail committee member Tom Howard of Lincoln said that property owners need not worry about seizure of their property.

"That will never happen," he said.

State Rep. Johnathan Rhyne, a trail supporter for years, gave another assurance that land would not be taken from property owners.

"There will be no condemnation for trails," he said. Land acquisition will be a "friendly, collaborative effort" and not forced on anyone.

Future generations, he said, would be grateful if the county approves and develops the plan.

Sylvia Wallace, chair of the county's Natural Resources Committee, said the trail plan would help the county make wise use of its natural resources, and her committee encourages its approval.

The trails would be developed over a 20-30-year period and has been endorsed by local governments and economic and civic organizations throughout the region including the East Lincoln Betterment Association.

<http://www.newsatnorman.com/default.asp?sourceid=&smenu=1&twindow=Default&mad=No&sdetail=2194&wpage=&skeyword=&sidate=&ccat=&ccatm=&restate=&restatus=&reoption=&retype=&repmin=&repmax=&rebed=&rebath=&subname=&pform=&sc=1967&hn=newsatnorman&he=.com>