

Trail seeks more funding

Network growth slows down

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By Meghan Cooke

Progress on a regional network of trails that will come through Cabarrus County has been delayed as local governments search for funds for the project.

The Carolina Thread Trail, a network of trails that aims to connect 15 counties in North and South Carolina and link cities and attractions, has garnered support from local officials and residents.

But establishing a timeline for completion is difficult when funding is scarce, said Londa Strong, director of Cabarrus County Parks and Recreation.

"Money is the timeline right now," she said.

Strong said municipalities within the county are pursuing the construction of trail segments within their boundaries as the county works to organize efforts. The county will help complete the trail by connecting municipalities' trails with segments outside city limits.

"Connectivity is the key," said Strong.

Reasons for encouraging the trail vary: creating less traffic on roads, improving air quality, connecting communities or fighting childhood obesity.

Locations identified as possible sites to be connected by the Carolina Thread Trail include Concord Mills mall, Charlotte Motor Speedway, the N.C. Research Campus, Reed Gold Mine in Midland and the Rocky River.

The trail was planned through a partnership between Catawba Lands Conservancy, The Trust for Public Land and Foundation for the Carolinas.

Cabarrus County recently received a grant funded by the N.C. Clean Water Management Trust Fund to help buy land in Mount Pleasant that would allow for a 1-mile stretch of the trail, leaving the county to pay \$10,000 for the land.

Strong said building the trail could cost up to \$1 million per mile.

Between the cost of design plans, erosion control and necessary permits, it's an expensive process, she said. Then trails must be dug, drains must be installed for water flow, and the trail must be filled with gravel and paved.

The county will soon begin applying for more grants to help pay for the project.

The Carolina Thread Trail recently received \$1 million from the N.C. Clean Water Management Trust Fund to support local communities as they acquire land for trails along



A Carolina Thread Trail sign unveiled last year. (Photo by Meghan Cooke)

waterways in participating N.C. counties. The grant brings the organization's total contribution to the Carolina Thread Trail to \$4 million, making it the largest source of public funding for the project.

The Carolina Thread Trail would include more than 100 miles of newly proposed trails across the county, according to the Carolina Thread Trail master plan adopted by local governments last year. Those 100 miles of trail would include about six miles of existing trails and 77 miles of trails already proposed by local governments.

About 77 percent of the trail would be along streams and rivers, 13 percent along existing bike routes and sidewalks and 4 percent along road rights of way.

An estimated 34 percent of all county residents would live within a half-mile of the proposed route, which would connect Kannapolis, Harrisburg, Concord, Mount Pleasant and Midland.

It's a piecemeal operation with municipalities and the county filling gaps as they can.

Cabarrus County is on par with the other participating counties in terms of progress, said Travis Morehead, the Carolina Thread Trail community coordinator for the county. He is one of seven staffers listed on the nonprofit organization's website.

The Carolina Thread Trail movement launched in 2007, and now there are 874 miles planned for the entire trail. About 63 miles are currently on the ground across the region.

It's a long-term project, said Morehead. The project was originally slated as a 20- to 30-year project, but now planners are looking at a 30- to 40-year timeline.

Existing Carolina Thread Trail segments in Cabarrus County include portions of the Harold B. McEachern Greenway in Concord and the Eighth Street Greenway and Baker's Creek Greenway in Kannapolis.

A Carolina Thread Trail sign was unveiled in September 2009, designating Concord's downtown connector, part of the McEachern Greenway, as a segment of the trail.

Concord is moving forward with plans to design the Rocky River Greenway, beginning with a section between Weddington Road and U.S. 29.

City officials are in the planning phases of developing a portion of the greenway that would reach from Weddington Road to the Riverwalk neighborhood off Pitts School Road. That segment would reach two-thirds of the way to U.S. 29.

There is currently no funding for the project, said Mark Kincaid, deputy director of Concord's parks and recreation department.

Kincaid said the city will eventually apply for grants, but construction might not begin until 2012 or 2013.

In the meantime, Concord has developed a park watch program. Similar to a neighborhood watch, the park watch involves volunteers who keep an eye out at city parks and greenways.

Kincaid said many people, including park watch members, have begun meeting up on local greenways to talk with friends and neighbors.

"There's a culture developing along the trail," said Kincaid. "The greenway is starting to feel like Main Street used to feel."

<http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2010/08/25/1632343/thread-trail-needs-funding.html#ixzz0xpnG19S6>