

Editorial: On greenways, Rowan takes different path

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The Carolina Thread Trail is making progress toward linking greenway segments through 15 counties in North Carolina and South Carolina. Rowan County could be part of that network, but county residents have been wary. Would they be forced to let the trail cross their property? Are trails prone to crime? Does anyone even use them?

The issue has not come before the Rowan County Board of Commissioners in several months, but last week's announcement about an addition to Salisbury's greenway stirred reaction on the Post's website. Readers revived the debate that came up in March. At the time, the county commissioners staked out their opposition to taking residents' property through eminent domain for trails, greenways or for use in economic development initiatives.

Rowan residents appear to be safe from eminent domain where the Thread Trail is concerned. No one has proposed or used eminent domain for the trail, and commissioners rejected a resolution of support for it last year. They don't want it.

Several of our neighboring counties see things differently. Some 644 miles of trail have been planned in seven counties that have adopted master plans — Cabarrus, Chester, Cleveland, Gaston, Lincoln, Mecklenburg and York. Three more counties are in the planning stages — Stanly, Catawba and Iredell. As Iredell held community meetings this summer to discuss the trail, people in Statesville talked about becoming known as a city of healthy living. Some expressed hope the trail would encourage young people to get out of the house and explore the outdoors. Others have likened the trail to a "green interstate system." They envision people walking, biking and exploring nature.

What about crime on greenways? Locally, the only experience we have to go on is the greenway in Salisbury. Police Chief Rorie Collins says no crimes have been reported over the past year directly on or in the immediate area around the city's greenway, which includes sections near Overton Elementary, Forest Hills, Memorial Park, Kelsey Scott Park and Brenner Avenue. Going back further in time, he says, city police have dealt with "only a few 'minor' incidents," all of which involved vandalism.

As for use, the city doesn't count the people who use the greenway, but Gail Elder White of the city's Parks and Recreation Department says it gets constant use.

Those signs all say "go" to city leaders, and Salisbury is to be commended for snagging \$500,000 in stimulus funds to extend the greenway. We're all going to pay for the federal stimulus packages; taxpayers here should get some benefit from them.

As for the county, well, it's pointless to put greenways where people don't want them. When commissioners rejected the resolution supporting participation in the Thread Trail, they said liability risks and maintenance costs outweighed possible benefits. Rowan is, after all, a poor county. Unless the board changes, that's it for the project here. Like much of the progress that takes place in this region, the Carolina Thread Trail will have to pass Rowan County by.

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