

Rowan commissioners OK byway extension, reject Thread Trail

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Rowan County commissioners have approved an extension of a scenic byway while rejecting a multi-county trail.

In both cases, commissioners debated concerns about encroachments on private property versus potential benefits of added tourism and enhanced health benefits.

The three commissioners with ties to farming and western Rowan combined Monday night to approve a request from the Mount Ulla Historic Preservation Society to extend the Millbridge Scenic Byway to take in several additional roads.

Vice Chairman Jon Barber and Commissioner Tina Hall, both of Mount Ulla, and Commissioner Raymond Coltrain, a career state agriculture specialist, voted to approve the expansion.

Chairman Carl Ford and Commissioner Chad Mitchell voted against the measure, contending the designation could affect the use of private property along the route.

Ford repeatedly questioned whether the expansion of the byway along N.C. 801 could prevent the county from building a tower for emergency communications.

He also asked County Attorney Jay Dees if the extension of the byway westward could have an impact on the location of a radio broadcast tower.

Dees quickly passed on that question, suggesting the conversation was getting "dangerously close" to conflict of interest. Prior to being hired as the county attorney, he represented Davidson County Broadcasting, which is continuing a nearly five-year-long effort to locate a tower in Mount Ulla.

Hall said the designation will help bring tourists to the area, which she described as Rowan County's diamond.

Commissioners unanimously rejected a resolution supporting the county's participation in the Carolina Thread Trail, a network of trails linking communities in 15 counties in the heart of the textile region.

Commissioners voiced concerns about the potential cost for maintenance and law enforcement, as well as the possibility of condemning private property for the trail.

The board agreed to a suggestion by Coltrain to have staff look at existing parks and determine if they can be included in the trail.

In other matters, the board:

- Set a June 1 public hearing to consider condemning a burned home at 310 Corriher Grange Road. The home burned in 2007, and efforts by the county to get the property owners to clean up the debris have failed.

- Approved hiring David Pokela, an attorney with the Greensboro firm of Nexsen Pruet, to represent county planning staff at a hearing on a proposed broadcast tower and conditional-use permit hearings. The rates range from \$220 to \$250 per hour.

Pokela has extensive experience in land use and real estate litigation.

- Approved reducing an economic development block grant from \$384,000 to \$214,000 for installation of a water line to RDH Properties. The project cost less than anticipated and the money will be returned to the state.

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