

LINCOLN TIMES-NEWS

Lincoln County's Home Newspaper

Hopes for where trail will lead

by: Jenna-Ley Harrison
(8/22/2011)



The Ballard Family of Iron Station rides their bikes Sunday on the Marcia H. Cloninger Rail-Trail between Sycamore and Pine streets. City officials hope to extend the popular walking trail from Pine Street to City Park. *Seth Mabry / LTN Photo*

City officials hope that adding more than a mile of greenway to a part of the Carolina Thread Trail will boost economic development.

The proposed trail segment will link City Park and Ramsour's Mill historic site and ultimately extend the 15-county Carolina Thread Trail, an initiative created in 2009 to link up multiple counties and more than 2 million citizens across North and South Carolina.

However, plans for the new Lincolnton addition are currently only in the design phase with funding for the project being a bit tricky for city officials.

"It's easily a million dollars," Lincolnton Planning Director Laura Simmons told the *Times-News* on Friday.

She's hopeful that the stretch of trail will benefit both the local economy and the community's recreational interests.

"With pedestrian and bicycle paths, you can literally get on a bike or walk through 15 counties and promote economic development and tourism and all sorts of goodies," Simmons said.

However, city officials are not sure when complete funding for the project will become available.

"That is the big gap we've got right now — how to come up with the construction dollars," she said.

The cost of designing the segment is \$11,500. However, the Carolina Thread Trail provided 80 percent of the funds through a grant that the city matched with a 20 percent share, ultimately paying more than \$2,000 towards the proposed greenway's design.

The idea for both the Carolina Thread Trail master plan and the portion of Lincolnton greenway linking the Revolutionary War battlefield and city park have been in the works for at least a decade authorities noted.

"The thread trail segment has been talked about 10 or 15 years," Simmons said.

Ultimately, the proposed greenway segment would link the community's rec. center to the city's "institutional" area behind Lincolnton High School's stadium to the area's "single family community" and all the way to the "historical amenity" of the local Ramsour's Mill, city officials said.

In addition to adding a portion of trail to what authorities are calling "The Thread," city officials are also in the design phase of adding a portion of trail, less than a mile in length, to the Marcia H. Cloninger Rail-Trail.

The city of Lincolnton is currently in the bidding process, and on Sept. 23, plans to select the lowest bidder to construct phase III of the Rail-Trail which will extend from Pine Street to City Park Simmons said. The existing Rail-Trail extends from Motz Avenue to Pine Street.

City planning authorities also said the county is planning to add another portion to the Carolina Thread Trail near Optimist Club Road in Denver.

Lincolnton residents are encouraged to attend a public meeting Thursday evening at City Hall to voice their opinions on the city's Clarks Creek / Walker Branch greenway proposal.

The meeting is 4:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Catawba Lands Conservancy has partnered with Foundation For the Carolinas in leading the Carolina Thread Trail initiative.

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