

## **Master plan to be created for county greenways**

### **Wednesday**

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By Derek Lacey, Times-News staff writer

Henderson County is working toward establishing a greenway master plan and looking at several options to leverage money from Hendersonville to secure grants for future greenway work.

The Board of Commissioners voted Wednesday to work with the French Broad Metropolitan Planning Organization to create the countywide greenway plan, and to accept more than \$170,000 from the city of Hendersonville for to-be-determined greenway work.

The county granted Hendersonville an easement in 2013 to construct a sewer line through Jackson Park, attaching the condition that the city construct a graveled greenway on top of the easement.

But the city found the area of the easement would not be suitable for the gravel surface, as it's located within the floodway, and is "covered by standing water a significant portion of the year," according to a letter to the county from City Manager John Connet.

So Hendersonville offered a payment of \$173,031.26 in lieu of constructing that section of the greenway, the same amount as the estimated cost of construction work, the letter says. It adds that "we do not believe that this is a wise expenditure of public funds."

The letter also recommends the money be used to reconstruct the portion of greenway between Fourth Avenue and Four Seasons Boulevard, which would cost an estimated \$260,000 and include work to elevate the portion of the trail by three feet, eliminating drainage problems that force the greenway to close.

County staff identified several ways the city's payment could be used for the greenway, including extending it through Jackson Park at an estimated cost of \$125,000 to \$280,000; extending it to the Athletics and Activity Center for \$300,000 to \$400,000; constructing a pedestrian bridge over Mud Creek to connect the greenway to the Fourth Avenue sidewalk at an estimated \$300,000; and developing the master plan, which the county estimates at \$75,000 to \$100,000.

County Engineer Marcus Jones said the city's payment could be used to leverage grants for several of the projects.

Jones said the county Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee recommended at its meeting Tuesday to recommend the county seek funding from the MPO, and supported a master plan for parks and recreation.

John Mitchell, county business and community development director, said the MPO is a complex organization. The MPO looks to see if a broad plan and feasibility study have been conducted when it approves funding, though it would fund the study through a match with the county.

"The upside to it is that of the grant options out there, the MPO funding is probably the best local match option" at 80 percent MPO and 20 percent county funding, Jones said. Most other grants are 50-50 matches.

The feasibility study would likely cost around \$40,000 to \$50,000 —20 percent of which the county would pay, he said.

Several residents spoke in favor of the effort during the informal public comment portion of the meeting. Philip Ellis said his family's decision to move into the Hyman Heights neighborhood was made mostly on the basis of locale and connectivity to the Oklawaha Greenway, which they use often.

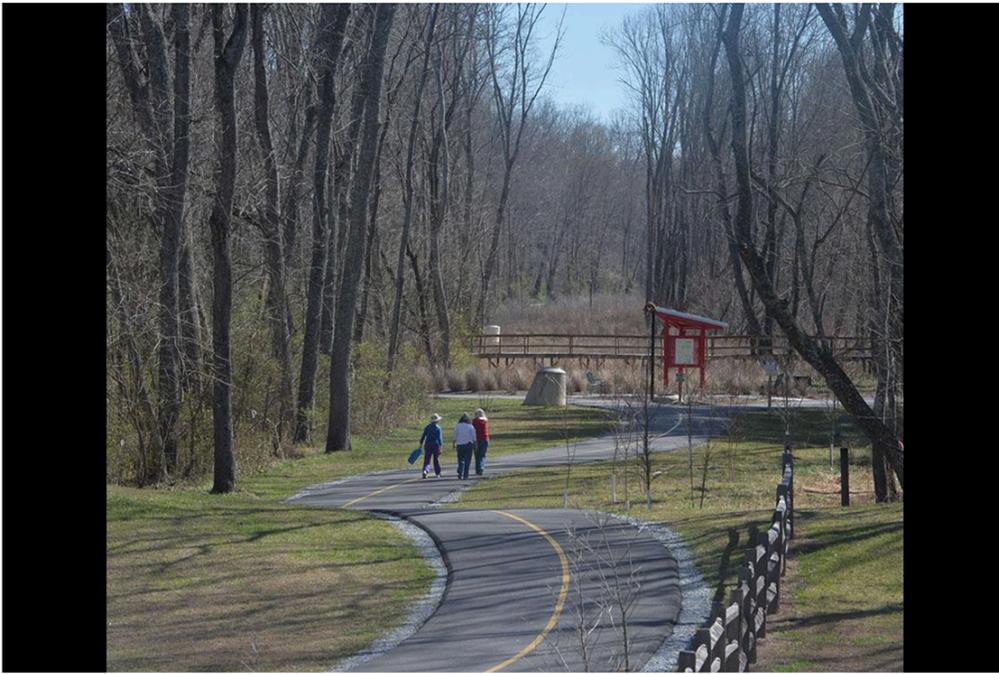
Suzanne Hale said that since she's pushing 70, she doesn't play soccer or tennis, but loves to walk on the greenway. She called it a "vibrant slice of the local environment" and said it's "really important to us seniors," some of whom use it to keep fit and restore health in the face of chronic health problems. She added that nearly one-third of county residents are over 60, and 46 percent are over 50.

She hopes to see the greenway extended, and was one of a couple of speakers who said she was willing to write a check to make that happen.

Southern Regional Director for Mountain True Gray Jernigan said "the value of the Oklawaha Greenway to our community cannot be overstated." He listed health, exercise, connection with nature, quality of life, alternative transportation, increased real estate prices and economic development.

He noted the successes of the Swamp Rabbit Trail in Traveler's Rest, S.C. and the Virginia Creeper Trail in Damascus, Va., which boost those local economies, and urged the board to take advantage of this opportunity to leverage funding from the MPO or state Department of Transportation to expand the greenway.

Joe Sanders cited AAA in saying the annual cost of maintaining a car is \$8,498. In Henderson County, 13.5 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. Forty percent of all trips made are two miles or less, he said, yet 87 percent of those are in vehicles. Seventy percent of North Carolinians said they would walk or bike if there were a safe, well-connected pedestrian and bicycle network.



▲ HIDE CAPTION

Henderson County is working toward establishing a master plan for the Oklawaha Greenway and looking at several options for more construction work there. - PATRICK SULLIVAN/TIMES-NEWS FILE

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