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County seeks grant for trail system

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A plan to create a nature **trail** that connects the **city** of Burlington's riverfront to the Big Hollow recreational area in Franklin Township is picking up steam.

Des Moines County supervisors voted unanimously Monday in favor of a resolution to allow the Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission to apply **for** a \$300,000 federal regional enhancement **grant** that would be used toward the estimated \$3.2 million **trail** project.

SEIRPC's Mike Norris reported the project was recently awarded \$360,000 in a **state** recreational **trails grant**, and that regional planning is still awaiting word on whether the project was awarded \$925,000 in other **grants**.

The county has \$379,000 put aside **for** the project, which will also benefit from \$521,000 in **state** Vision Iowa **grant** money, Norris said during an interview after the supervisors meeting.

With the county money, Vision Iowa dollars and \$360,000 **state** recreational **grant**, the project has \$1.26 million of project funding already in place, he said.

Norris said six people who own property where the **trail** is proposed to run have agreed to easement options, and that SEIRPC still needs to obtain 14 more easement options.

Norris said a handful of property owners who at first seemed agreeable to signing off on easement agreements have since changed their minds and now don't want to participate.

"We're going to try and contact them again in the future," he said, adding that the reason some property owners don't want to cooperate is due to "misinformation about this **trail** and **trails** in general."

Norris said some people believe that a **trail** running through their properties would be an invitation to trespassing, litter and crime.

"But that's just not consistent with other **trails** in this **state**," he said.

Should some property owners decide not to agree to easements, Norris said regional planning will have to alter the proposed **trail** path.

"If people don't want to participate, we're not going to make them participate," he said. "That's really their choice ... Then we have to come up with a 'Plan B.' "

As **for** the timeline, Norris expects the project to be started sometime next year and completed by the summer of 2008.

Beth Breitenstein, of the Greater Burlington Convention and Visitor's Bureau, is a member of the **trails** advisory committee.

The committee is comprised of nine members, and is working with four subcommittees, which in total boast nearly 20 members, Breitenstein and Norris said.

There's a communications subcommittee, a rules and guidelines subcommittee, there's a subcommittee **for trail** concepts and another one **for** volunteers, Norris said.

Norris said much has been accomplished over the past year on the project.

"The county appointed the advisory committee, went through the (request **for** proposals) process **for** consultants, we had two public outreach meetings," he said, adding that Fairfield firm French-Reneker Associates was ultimately hired as the consultants.

Breitenstein said the **trail** should do wonders **for** the county by adding to the quality of life **for** residents and acting as a catalyst to make the area more appealing to new residents.

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