



PUBLIC INFORMATION

ITEM NO. 1.

DATE OF MEETING: November 5, 2012

REQUESTED BY: West Pender Rail-Trail Alliance

SHORT TITLE: West Pender Rail-Trail Alliance Economic Development Presentation.

BACKGROUND: West Pender Rail-Trail (WPRTA) Board members are present to give an overview/update regarding the WPRTA Project. Detailed information is attached.

Pender County Commissioners Information Packet
For November 5th, 2012
Pender County Commissioners Meeting
West Pender Rail-Trail Alliance Economic Development presentation

Overview

In 2011, Pender County received a grant from the NC Recreational Trail Program (RTP) to build the first mile of a multi-purpose trail along US 421 on the Commerce Park Property. This grant was unanimously approved by the Pender County Board of Commissioners. The grant was the result of years of combined effort on the part of individuals and regional entities that make up the West Pender Rail Trail Alliance (WPRTA). Currently the project is in abeyance and the time to use the grant funding is running out. This is a request to move forward with the project.

1) WPRTA Project Outline and Support

The West Pender Rail-Trial Alliance is a 501(c)(3) non-profit community initiative to preserve and enhance the quality of life in western Pender County by converting an abandoned railroad corridor into a multi-use community heritage trail. We are currently focusing on the section that runs from the USS North Carolina Battleship Park in Wilmington to Moores Creek National Battlefield Park in Currie. WPRTA is officially supported by;

Pender County Parks and Recreation
Pender County Planning
North Carolina Rail-Trails
Wilmington Metropolitan Planning Organization
Cape Fear Council of Governments
Mid Atlantic RTAC and RTCC
Pender County Health Department
UNCW Obesity Prevention Initiative
Cape Fear Resource Conservation and Development
Moores Creek National Battlefield Park
USS North Carolina Battleship Park
Moores Creek Battleground Association
National Rails to Trail Conservancy
East Coast Greenway Alliance
Cape Fear Sierra Club
SORBA Mountain Bike Club
Greater Currie Community Action Group
The Moores Creek Conservation Alliance
Currie Events Committee
Cape Fear Cyclists
Wilmington Road Runners

Funding Awarded:

NC DENR, 2011 Recreational Trails Program (RTP). \$72,404. For construction of the first mile of trail, on the former rail bed along the Pender Commerce Park.

Cape Fear Cyclists. \$2750 (\$750, \$1000 and \$1,000 awarded in 2010, 2011, 2012, respectively).

National Park Service, 2011 Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program. National Park Service **trail planner services for one year.** Bill Lane from Atlanta NPS office is our designated planner.

This WPRTA has been made possible by seven years of support in the form of donated labor and professional expertise from our board and 150 members.

2) Economic Benefits of Trail Facilities

A Case Study of the North Carolina Northern Outer Banks, 2004 found that Bicyclists in the northern Outer Banks region of North Carolina have an **annual economic impact of \$60 million**. The annual economic impact of cyclists is almost nine times as much as the one-time expenditure of public funds to construct special bicycle facilities in the region.
http://www.ncdot.gov/bikeped/download/bikeped_research_EIABrochure.pdf

“Trails consistently remain the **number one community amenity** sought by prospective homeowners.” — *National Association of Homebuilders (2008)*

“The Carolina Thread Trail alone provides over \$42 Million in tourism dollars and \$250 Million in direct and indirect economic impact from its construction” and “helped create an estimated 2,700 construction related jobs.” <http://www.carolinathreadtrail.org/>

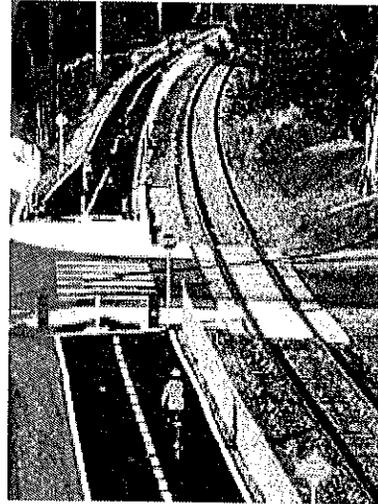
Several other studies; http://www.brucefreemanrailtrail.org/trail_plans/rail_trail_studies.html

3) Facts & Concerns about Trail Facilities along the Commerce Park Frontage

a. Facts & Concerns About Safety of Trail Crossings Along Commerce Park Frontage

Concern: We have heard the concern that siting trail facilities along a heavily-trafficked industrial corridor is not safe and that particularly crossing these facilities is not safe

Fact: Trail crossings along industrial corridors occur all across the region, North Carolina and the nation. In order to make trail traffic and industrial traffic operate in harmony; facilities must be designed correctly with appropriate traffic control devices. Use of traffic control devices for trail traffic is common and functions well in regional examples (further discussed in 3c). Engineering guidance from both the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) & the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) is well-documented and widely used for designing trails and trail intersections along industrial corridors (see Section 5.3 of AASHTO Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities and MUTCD chapter 9)



Trail users respond to traffic control devices.

b. Facts & Concerns About Liability of Trail Along Commerce Park Frontage

Concern: We have heard the concern that siting trail facilities along a corridor will incur heavy liability for the County.

Fact: NCGS 113A-95 limits the duty of care owed to trail users to that of a “trespasser” -the lowest standard owed- provided the landowner or the entity that constructed the trail did not receive any compensation. Source: § 113A-95. *Trail use liability.*

4) Looking at Similar Facilities and Proposed Facilities in the Region

Numerous rail-trails exist in industrial corridors and metropolitan communities, with high volumes of vehicular traffic.

- **Gary Shell Cross-City Trail**

30,000 vehicles travel along Oleander Dr. in Wilmington, NC each day. Like portions of US 421, Oleander Drive is designated for STAA Dimensioned Vehicles (for 53’ trailers and twin trailers) on the NCDOT State Truck Network. Oleander Drive is also designated by the military as a STRAHNET (strategic highway network) route. This section of US 421 does

not have either of these designations, but south of I-140, US421 has the same NCDOT Truck Network designation. The Gary Shell Cross City Trail crosses Oleander Dr. at Independence Blvd, an intersection which sees 50,000 vehicles per day. Trail users easily respond to traffic control devices such as signalized intersections and trail stop signs.

- **Shipyard Boulevard Proposal**

The current draft of the New Hanover County Comprehensive Greenway Plan proposes a similar multi-use trail along Shipyard Boulevard, which is located in a heavily industrialized corridor on the main route to the NC State Port of Wilmington. In the current draft, this project is ranked 16 out of 58 prioritized regional projects.

- **US 421 Proposal**

The current draft of the New Hanover County Comprehensive Greenway Plan proposes similar multi-use trails to connect south from the Pender County line along US 421 all the way to the site of the USS North Carolina Battleship. These projects will be mutually beneficial and supportive of trail development along the US 421 industrial corridor.

5) Potential Collaborative Opportunities for WPRTA & Pender County Commerce Park

a. Moving forward with current funded plan.

The most desirable option from the WPRTA perspective is to keep the trail in the supported location as outlined in the RTP grant. While WPRTA understands that there is a desire to provide rail service to the Commerce Park, we would assume that the rail line would not be located along the full frontage of the Commerce Park as this would regularly block all access and egress from the park when in use. Assuming that rail service would not be located along the frontage of the Commerce Park, the RTP-delineated location would be able to function in a completely separate location and thus not affect the desired future rail service. The greatest advantages of keeping the WPRT in the current alignment are that all previous stakeholders are on-board and it is likely that the RTP grant money & relationship would remain intact for Pender County.

b. Rails-with-Trails Option

The WPRTA does not see the desire to locate rail along the full frontage of the Commerce Park as being in conflict with the location of the trail as outlined in the RTP grant. Many communities utilize the Rails-with-Trails option.

A rail-with-trail is a public path that runs parallel to a still-active rail line. There are more than 115 rail-with-trails in the country. In this case, the relationship between the trail and the rail is all the more significant. Rail-with-trails are operating under a wide variety of conditions. The rail and trail share an easement and are sometimes separated by extensive fencing.

c. Trail Elsewhere on Property Option

This option will mean losing the RTP grant. We were fortunate to receive this grant as it was one of the last grants to receive RTP funding for Phase 1 projects. Other funding in NC for rural trails is extremely rare at this time.

d. Trail on east side of US 421

This is the least desirable option as it will mean losing the RTP grant and substantially complicate the feasibility and safety of the project. It will require the trail crossing US 421 twice.

6) Action Requested

WPRTA requests that Pender County proceed with the supported plans for the West Pender Rail Trail in the Pender Commerce Park as outlined in the RTP grant by:

1. Instruct the Pender County Planning and Community Development staff to proceed as lead organization on trail building project.
2. Develop plan specifications and engineering documents.
3. Announce bid for contract.
4. Complete construction and all requirements of the grant by November 15, 2013.

Respectfully submitted on October 22nd, 2012,

Tamlyn Shields, President, WPRTA
Carrie Banks, Vice President, WPRTA
Susan Bullers, WPRTA, Board
Nan Pope, WPRTA, Board