

Columbiana County applies for Greenway grant

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Plans to renovate a train station are on hold.

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VINDICATOR SALEM BUREAU

LISBON — The Little Beaver Creek Greenway Trail is slowly heading toward completion.

The Columbiana County Commissioners have applied to get a \$10,000 Appalachian Community & Economic Impact Grant as the next step in finishing the northern portion of the trail.

Dottie Betz, chairwoman of the Columbiana County Parks District, said it will put another \$10,000 of its funds toward the project.

The \$20,000 would be used to begin clearing the former Erie Lackawanna railroad bed from High Street in Leetonia to Union Street in Washingtonville.

The money would be used to remove trees on the right-of-way and help improve drainage, Betz said. The tracks were removed years ago.

To improve and pave the 1 1/2-mile stretch will cost about \$400,000, she said.

There's no time line or funding set to complete the trail. But when it's done, the Greenway in the county will be linked to the Mahoning County portion of the Lake to River Greenway in Washingtonville.

Popular site Betz said the Greenway brings 150,000 people to the county each year, making it one of the county's top tourist and recreation sites. The trail officially opened in 2000.

Betz said the number is an estimate. But she said a friend, while walking one weekend, counted 300 people on the trail in one hour.

People used to ask about the Rogers Sale as a destination spot, she said.

"Now, it's the bike trail," she said.

Betz credited a positive story in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette in 2005 with drawing out-of-towners to the county's portion of the Greenway, even though the story noted that the Greenway is a 90-minute drive from Pittsburgh.

On weekends, Betz said, it's difficult to find a parking spot at the trailhead in Leetonia, and not much better on weekdays.

When asked who's the biggest recipient of the tourist dollars, Betz said with a laugh, "the Dairy Queen in Leetonia."

Station renovation

The county had planned to take bids this month to renovate Lisbon's former train station at the southern end of the trail. Bert Dawson, Columbiana County engineer, said that may take another year.

The county still doesn't have a matching grant to complete the financing, Dawson said. The project needs an additional \$100,000 to \$120,000 to complete the financing.

The county got one grant of \$29,000, which was used to obtain all the needed permits. It also got a grant for the \$578,961 for the work on the station.

Dawson said he hopes the county will be able to keep that money until next year. Normally, the funds, if not spent after two years, go back to the state. Dawson said he's talked to Sean Logan, director of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and former Columbiana County commissioner, about keeping the funds.

In the meantime, the park board is helping to put in an overflow parking lot behind the train station.

The railroad line did not extend south of Lisbon. There have been discussions, including some with officials at Beaver Creek State Park, on various routes to connect the trail to the Ohio River to complete the Lake to River title.

"That's our dream," Betz said.

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For more information, including a map of the trail, visit www.bicycletrail.com