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Commissioners support trail extension plans

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LISBON — The Columbiana County Commissioners pledged their support Wednesday for a state funding application to extend the Little Beaver Creek Greenway Trail from Leetonia to Washingtonville.

The county Park District planned to file the application for Transportation Enhancement Funds from the Ohio Department of Transportation for funding in 2011, giving the board members and supporters time to raise the \$80,000 required for a 20 percent match.

Park Board Chairman Dottie Betz previously said the cost to construct the nearly 1.5-mile leg from High Street in Leetonia to Bertolette Alley in Washingtonville was estimated at \$400,000. The trail will follow the former Erie Lackawanna Railroad bed and bring the county's section that much closer to the Mahoning County MetroParks Trail.

Both trails are part of the Great Ohio Lake-to-River Greenway Trail which will stretch from Ashtabula to Lisbon.

"I think this is a really great move," Commissioner Dan Bing said.

All three commissioners praised the park board and the value of the trail to the county, with Commissioner Jim Hoppel noting how it's a benefit to both residents and visitors.

Commissioner Penny Traina talked about the passion of the park officials in trying to make improvements, referring to the board as "the little engine that could."

Bing also praised the volunteers and groups who work to maintain the trail.

"This is a very exciting time for us," park board vice chairman Mike West said Tuesday after a tree-planting ceremony at Scenic Vista Park.

Betz and West said they're expecting to hear next week about two applications filed for Clean Ohio funds, with one requesting \$476,000 to help the district purchase 460 acres in Madison Township off of state Route 7 and East Liverpool Road for another park. The other application asked for \$50,000 to purchase 2 acres of land from the James Logan estate in Washingtonville for the Greenway trail extension.

The board has been working on the deal for the Dailey Family Trust property for more than a year, with the Ohio Chapter of Nature Conservancy already agreeing to provide up to 49 percent of the money needed to cover the \$900,000 purchase price, Betz explained.

Initial plans call for the park district to install an access road and parking lot for the proposed new park which will have conservation easements along Little Beaver Creek.

When asked how the district will be able to maintain such a large property, Betz said most of it will be left in its natural state.

"We can't pass up an opportunity like this," West said.

Last summer the park district received a \$10,000 grant from the Appalachian Community & Economic Impact program from the governor's office to help pay the cost of clearing the abandoned railroad path between Leetonia and Washingtonville.

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