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Towpath eyed as bike trail extension

By TOM GIAMBRONI/Staff Writer

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LISBON — Officials are investigating the possibility of linking Guilford Lake to the Little Beaver Creek Greenway Trail by way of the old Sandy & Beaver Canal towpath. Mike West of the Columbiana County Park District board said they have begun researching what it would take to obtain the right of way easements needed to resurrect the old towpath as a five-mile bike trail. The Sandy & Beaver Canal linked Bolivar in Stark County to just beyond East Liverpool at Glasgow, Pa., on the Ohio River. The 73-mile canal operated for about four years before going out of business in the early 1850s. The canal no longer exists, but West said you still can make out portions of the towpath where mules pulled the canal boats. The portion of the canal towpath being considered is the section from Guilford Lake to Lisbon. West said the trail being proposed would run from the parking lot at the south end of Guilford Lake, heading east across property owned by Salem and several private properties before dropping south and crossing state Route 172 into the county farm land owned by county commissioners. The trail would resume eastward until it connects with the existing bike trail at Furnace Road outside Lisbon. West has spoken with Salem officials and county commissioners, who indicated they would have no objection to granting the necessary easement allowing the bike trail to go through their property. He is also in the process of contacting the private property owners. "This is all tentative upon agreement of the property owners," he said. Permission also would be needed from Hanover and Center townships since bicyclists would have to ride along portions of township roads when getting on and off either end of the new trail. If property easements are obtained from all parties, the next step would be to perform a survey and hire an engineering firm to determine how much the trail link — which would be called the Sandy and Beaver Canal Towpath Extension — would cost and then seek federal funding through an Ohio Department of Transportation grant program that provides funding for bike trails. "The money's out there. If the grant is filled out right, there shouldn't be a problem," West said, adding construction would be at least two to three years off at best. "There's still a great deal to be done." In addition to property owners and township officials, West said he intends to speak with the Guilford Lake Civic Association. "I want them to be part of this," he said. He believes the trail extension would prove as popular with local residents and bicyclists from outside the county as the existing trail. "The people at Guilford would flock to it. It would only enhance the community," West said. The local law firm of Harrington, Hoppe & Mitchell is donating its services in the form of attorney Chris Baronzzi, who is a trail user. "That's huge, That will save us a lot of money," West said. tgiambroni@mojonews.com

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