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Bike, pedestrian path to link cities

By Andrea Uhde

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Rita Willis can run 3 miles in her La Grange subdivision -- but finding a longer route is a challenge.

"There is not a place where you can do six miles in the entire county," said Willis, who lives in Crystal Lake. "I've called all over to find a route."

But Oldham is about to get its first bike and pedestrian path -- a 3.2-mile route from La Grange to the Buckner area possibly within the next two years. Eventually that trail will be extended through Crestwood and Pewee Valley.

It's just one of many potential trails officials hope to create.

Willis and seven other residents spoke in support of the trail plans last week during the Oldham County Planning and Zoning Commission's monthly meeting.

The commission voted unanimously to support a master plan for bike and walking paths, which it will use as a guideline when making regulations.

The master plan will be presented to Fiscal Court on April 15 or during one of its May meetings.

It shows many miles of trails twisting from all sides of the county. One would have a bike lane along the southern portion of the county. Another would loop Wendell Moore Park in Buckner.

The routes were recommended by various groups and residents in the county. At one time, the plan had possible trails along Harrod's Creek and the Ohio River, but those were removed after several residents voiced concerns.

Emily Liu of the Planning and Zoning Department said the projects will take years to complete. "This is a very, very long-range planning project."

There are more immediate plans for a trail from the Oldham 8 theater on Ky. 53 in La Grange to Allen Lane, from Allen Lane along Commerce Parkway to Ky. 393 and north along Ky. 393 to the Buckner area. The trail would be about 4.2 miles, and engineering and design for most of it is nearly done, Liu said.

The state will build the trail along Ky. 393 in Buckner when it realigns the road in the next few years, she said. The federal government will pay \$850,000 for the portion from La Grange to Ky. 393, and about \$200,000 more will come from the city of La Grange, the county, donations and Greenways for Oldham County. Liu said the county's portion won't be more than \$100,000.

The master plan will help justify grants for trails, said Doug Wampler, who was on a steering committee that helped with the plan. He said trails also will add value to the community.

"Plan for the future, plan for the needs of this county," Wampler told the commission.

Some people, however, had concerns about who would maintain the trails and how much that would cost.

Thomas Deibel of the Crestwood area said if volunteer groups maintain them, the groups could lose interest. It's going to fall back on the county; it's going to fall back on the taxpayer," he said.

Chris Haunz of Pewee Valley said his neighborhood already has issues with illicit dumping, and trails nearby could make things worse.

Liu said most of the trails will be along the roads. Maintaining them would be like maintaining a sidewalk, and costs will be minimal, she said.

The next step in the master-plan process includes establishing a committee to implement the plan and oversee greenway planning and funding. Funding options range from grants and partnerships to fundraising events and government sources. Also, the trails could be built as part of planned road improvements.

Liu said no specific properties have been identified, but property owners near the trails would be contacted once the projects begin.

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