

RUIDOSO NEWS

River Trail features materialize at session

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Plenty of ideas were thrown out at the well-attended public input session Monday to help designers come up with a plan for the first phase of The Ruidoso River Trail.

Laura Doth, who serves on the Billy the Kid Scenic Byways Committee and wrote the grant application that earned a \$250,000 award in 2008, said people in Ruidoso have been waiting three or more decades for a promised walking and biking area along the Rio Ruidoso.

Earlier plans promoted under the MainStreet program envisioned beginning at Mechem Drive and moving down river to Two Rivers Park and the Ruidoso Valley Chamber of Commerce, involving primarily private land.

The current proposal instead, will use 9.7 linear acres of village-owned property, removing many legal obstacles. When the first phase from Two Rivers Park to a park at the River Crossing complex is finished, Doth said she hopes private landowners further upstream will be so impressed by the end product, they will want to be part of the Phase 2 future endeavor and the desired "spurs" that could offer special opportunities. The second phase would run from River Crossing up to Eagle Drive.

"We hope the property owners see what a wonderful asset it will be and how it will enhance their property," she said. "We want very much for this to be a community project.

"If some say no, we will find a way around it," she said of the property owners.

A grant application for Phase 2 was submitted to the Scenic Byways program in 2010, and,

"is sitting on the desk of the Secretary of Transportation in Washington D.C.," Doth said. "I feel hopeful, We were ranked number one in the state of New Mexico, so I hope there will be more money to continue the project."

The Byways money comes from the Federal Highway Administration, she said. The Federal Highway Administration provides 80 percent of the cost and the village matches with 20 percent using labor and equipment.

The River Trail project meets many of the goals promoted by other agencies as well, she said.

"The timing is good on this, because all of the different federal programs fit perfectly with what the trail will provide, the anti-obesity campaign (from the White House) and push for exercise; the Discover the Forest initiative from the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management's get out and active program."

"Many federal programs are emphasizing the quality of life element and we raise stars for that 'livability' factor," Doth said.

One already willing but impatient private property participant is Johnny Durham, who lives on Robin Road, and encouraged Doth to, "eliminate the red tape and get it done."

"If only I could," Doth replied, adding, "I wish you could convince the State Environment Department of that." The department is one of the many approvals required for any design structures.

A major change in the approach to a multiple use path along the river is tied to a switch from a "river walk" to a "river trail" concept, acknowledging the varied and often challenging nature of the terrain and space along the river.

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Doth said the new approach will feature an outdoor public art sculpture park, funded by an annual art show and sale. Additional volunteer support will come from a Friends of the Ruidoso River Trail group.

Scott Belonger, an engineer with Loris and Associates Inc., the Colorado company charged with designing the trail, said he should be back in about six weeks with the preliminary plans. The company specializes in bike-related trails in Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona and Wyoming, primarily in resort towns. Doth said possibly by fall, some trail construction could begin.

Belonger said the process covers four steps, determining the desired results, establishing goals to obtain those results, identifying opportunities and challenges and finding solutions. The thrust of the four would include stimulating the economy and promoting a healthy life-style, designing features that are visible and attractive, provide interpretation and signing information, inviting exploration, to stay within budget, figuring how to offer comfortable multiple use, and to safeguard natural environment while providing long-term durability from such events as the July 2008 flood on the Rio Ruidoso.

While Americans With Disability handicapped access will be provided in some areas, other portions of the trail may not be suitable for the elderly, for strollers and for the disabled, and information to that effect should be displayed prominently, Belonger said.

Some areas may accommodate walking, running, jogging and biking, but others may be too narrow.

The surface of the trail may be chipped wood or could be a hard surface to better accommodate strollers and people a little unsteady on their feet or using walkers and canes. In some portions, the trail may venture onto a side street and share space. Just how that arrangement can be designed for safe use without great expense will be a challenge for Loris, he said.

Some of the other challenges will be steep grades, crossing the river, the possible need for retaining walls to prevent erosion, dealing with natural features and fitting an 8-foot to 10-foot wide path into the terrain, especially with limited rights of way on Robin Road and Rio Street. "We want to showcase

the natural features and consider viewpoints and overlooks," he said.

"To begin the design, we have broken the first phase into three smaller pieces, the sculpture park being the first," he said, adding the layout will be handled by Chris Green with Consensus Planning, a landscape planner from Albuquerque with 700 parks to his credit.

Doth said the vision behind the sculpture park is a similar park in Loveland, Colo., celebrating its 27th anniversary and boasting 700 sculptures worth \$6 million. "It draws visitors year-round," she said. "On Labor Day, they have an art sale and it's a huge event."

The concept would enhance the village's art community, provide permanent exhibits and sale proceeds would be used to purchase permanent assets, she said. "We would start small and if we can buy one bronze the first year, that would be a success to me," she said.

The project also will encourage interaction with the art. Enough space exists at Two Rivers for the first five to 10 years, but eventually, art work would be spaced along the trail, giving people a reason to explore and continue their walk. Maps would be available as in Loveland to indicate the location of each sculpture.

Green said the Ruidoso sculpture park would be more intimate and on a different scale than Colorado, balancing user interests in the park with the art. Possibly a small stage area could be built for

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small concerts. Pathways could be provided to maintain a connection with the water for children and those who may want to fish, he said.

A resident suggested that information also be posted about needed licenses for fishing and where they can be obtained.

Frederic Moras worried about the width of the path and said at least 12 feet is needed for walking, dogs on leashes and biking.

Eugene Heathman with the Ruidoso Valley Economic Development Corporation, suggested that organizations such as the Boy Scouts of America be involved in aspects of the development. He said Child Unlimited raised money for a fishing lake in the community where he grew up. "We can't rely on \$250,000 for each phase," he said.

Other comments included:

- the U.S. Forest Service indicated an interest in developing a path from the trail to the fire lookout tower.
- possibly erecting some walking bridges over the river at different points.
- using barriers to separate traffic from walkers and bikers on the trail when it converges with a road.
- investigating the use of money from the Art in Public Places funding available to the village.
- forming public/private partnerships or finding corporate sponsorships for benches and other amenities.
- look at barbecue pits or gas grills, possibly partnering with Zia Natural Gas.
- consider not lighting the path to avoid glare for residents of homes on the mountain above the trail, or using lights oriented downward.
- find an area accessible for the handicapped, who want to fish. Durham said some deeper "holes" of water must be created for the trout habitat, if fishing is to be encouraged.
- fears that a flat-surfaced trail would invite skateboarders and roller bladers, disrupting the leisure and natural environment experience. Belonger said the path may be too narrow for those uses.
- using speed pads to slow traffic where the trail joins roads. Belonger and Doth said the trail does not seem adaptable for horseback riding when miles of unencumbered land for riding are available on Bureau of Land

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