



County takes cautious steps on Thread Trail

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After much heated discussion, the Lincoln County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to accept a \$46,000 grant from the Carolina Thread Trail for the purchase of easements for a local segment of the trail.

The discussion centered on the issue of maintenance of the segment and what the Carolina Thread Trail's expectation would be of the county, in terms of funding, if commissioners decided to accept the grant and allow construction to move forward.

County Manager George Wood noted that he had changed some of the language in the grant agreement to specifically state that no maintenance would be conducted without prior approval by the board. The county would continue to maintain the East Lincoln Community Center, however, as it already does. Wood recommended that commissioners approve the route — which would run from the East Lincoln Community Center to Sally's YMCA — for the segment, accept the grant using the amended implementation grant agreement and reiterate to the Carolina Thread Trail that any requests for funding of either construction or maintenance must be made as part of the normal budgetary cycle.

As Wood stated in a memo to the board regarding the grant, this would be in conformance with the existing policy and would get the easements for the project at no cost to the county.

Commissioner Jim Klein questioned why the issue of maintenance was being singled out and treated differently with this particular grant agreement and suggested moving forward on a by-proposal basis with a look at the finances involved.

Commissioner Carl Robinson expressed his frustration, in reference to past resolutions on the issue and subsequent language changes, with the board playing games with the words.

"We keep tweaking this thing," he said, adding that the county should not start grants that it doesn't plan to use.

Commissioner George Arena noted that there is no public space to walk in eastern Lincoln County and that the plan would be to try to leverage private money.

Commissioner Carrol Mitchem felt that there were too many differences in understanding regarding the proposed grant agreement, though both Arena and Chairman Alex Patton stressed that no further action or funding could proceed without the Carolina Thread Trail first coming back to the board for approval.

Mitchem made a motion to table the discussion and a vote on the grant until the next meeting, but it failed to carry, with Patton, Arena and Robinson opposed. Commissioners then voted unanimously to approve both the proposed 1.7-mile segment and to accept the grant, though Klein said after the vote, for the record, that he was unaware of the language change regarding maintenance being included in the agreement voted upon at the time and was against moving forward.

Bosch expansion

Also at Monday's meeting, commissioners conducted a public hearing for and then unanimously approved an incentive grant agreement with Robert Bosch Tool for a facility expansion that will result in an investment of \$3.5 million by the company and the creation of at least seven new jobs, paying average weekly wages of \$400, within two years.

If those obligations are met, the county will then provide cash grants of roughly \$9,500 per year for a five-year period. The facility upgrade is set to begin on or before May 1.

Other action

In other board action at Monday's meeting:

- Commissioners unanimously approved two conditional-use permit requests, both of which were recommended for approval by the Planning Board. One will allow for applicant Iron Station Thunder to sell vehicles on Major Lane in Ironton Township, with no more than four vehicles displayed near the highway. The other approved request was from applicant Melissa Lefler and will allow her to operate a kennel in a general-industrial district on Commerce Drive in Catawba Springs Township. Commissioners also unanimously approved proposed amendments to the Lincoln County Unified Development Ordinance, as recommended by the Planning Board.
- Commissioners heard a report from Martin Eaddy of the Airport Authority, during which he stressed the importance of the Lincolnton-Lincoln County Airport for economic development and highlighted major planned projects for the coming year.
- Commissioners unanimously approved of an Emergency Operations Plan and resolutions.
- Commissioners unanimously signed off on a bid approval for the replacement of the HVAC system at the Jonas Library in the amount of roughly \$79,000 and of the disposition of the Forney Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant, which, following a study, has been recommended for permanent closure. Both requests were presented by Public Works Director Burns Whittaker, who was on his last day on the

job after previously submitting his resignation. Both Patton and Wood commended him for his work with the county, with Patton adding that he was a “valuable asset” who had saved the county “a lot of money.” Wood said Whittaker had done an “outstanding job,” especially given the fact that he “came into an office that had some issues,” and noted that the Public Works Department was much stronger today because of his leadership.

- Commissioners unanimously approved a letter of support for the Mountain Island Educational State Forest. The Lincoln County Board of Education has also previously approved the drafting of such a letter.
- Commissioners selected March 12 as the date for their upcoming work session.