

Greenway plans unveiled

By Nina Kult

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An overwhelming response to the proposed Dardenne Greenway in St. Charles County has representatives from the Great Rivers Greenway District feeling optimistic.

More than 200 residents attended one of three open house events hosted last week in St. Charles, St. Peters and O'Fallon.

The purpose of each open house was to field questions and educate residents about the conceptual 36-mile greenway, which parallels Dardenne Creek.

Representatives from the Great River Greenway District and St. Louis-based SWT Design were on hand to answer questions and explain how the project would work.

The Great Rivers Greenway District is a public organization leading the development of a region-wide system of interconnected greenways, parks and trails known as The River Ring.

Their latest proposal is for the Dardenne Greenway, which would connect to the River Ring and offer a number of open spaces for hiking, biking, canoeing, kayaking and other recreational opportunities.

A greenway is an open space connector linking parks, residential areas, nature reservations, common areas, civic amenities, cultural institutions and historical sites. It is usually established along a natural corridor, such as streams and rivers.

The Dardenne Greenway would connect the cities of St. Peters, O'Fallon, Cottleville, Dardenne Prairie, and possibly St. Charles, as well as areas of unincorporated St. Charles County.

"Our big idea for the whole district is the River Ring and bringing people back the river," said project manager Nancy Ulman. "In doing that, people becoming more aware of the environment and want to protect it."

While there was a mix of responses, Jim Wolterman, project manager from SWT, said most were receptive to the Dardenne Greenway idea.

Some voiced concerns about how the project would be funded, when would it be finished and if eminent domain would be used.

Wolterman said projects of the Great Rivers Greenway District are funded by one-tenth of a cent sales tax already approved by voters and eminent domain will not be used.

"The Great Rivers Greenway District has no authority for eminent domain and would not proceed in that manner," he said.

Woltermann said the project is a chance for residents to develop their own plan.

"The Great Rivers Greenway has gotten into the practice of listening to its constituents," he said. "Some were anxious to find out what's going on and others seemed to feel relieved about the project."

The greenway can only be created with the cooperation of the residents who agree to donate right of way. There are 380 property owners adjacent to the proposed greenway. Negotiations with those property owners have not begun.

"We not here to condemn or acquire property," Ulman said. "We're here to gain input from the residents."

Ulman said the Great Rivers Greenway District has no timeline at this point. It could be 15, 20 years or quicker, if residents buy into it, she said.

St. Charles resident Vernon Schroeder said his property near the Dardenne Greenway would be affected by the plan.

He said he is not opposed to the idea, but he does have some reservations about the width of the right of way needed.

"One hundred feet of right of way on each side is fine, but 500 to 1,000 feet is too much," he said. "I can see the benefits for others, but it's just too big of area."

Resident Glen Gettemeyer favored the idea and said he wished the Great Rivers Greenway District would have thought of this 20 years ago.

"It's nice to see fishing and boating - getting back to the way things used to be," he said.

Ulman said, in general, most people have been positive about some outdoor recreation along Dardenne Creek and support keeping some area of the creek open.

"There are concerns about property impact, but a lot are interested in canoeing, kayaking and more recreational opportunities," she said.

Hunter Beckham, project manager at SWT, said some of those who did have a strong opinion against the project, changed their minds by the time they left.

"When they heard that everyone has a voice in the project, they eased up a little," he said. "It's a conceptual plan and everybody matters."

What's next?

Representatives from SWT and the Great Rivers Greenway district plan to review all resident surveys and personal conversations that occurred during the open house series.

In 2007, the organization plans to host another three-part open house series with a more definite plan for the Dardenne Greenway.

For more information about the Dardenne Greenway or the Great Rivers Greenway District, visit www.greatrivers.info or call (314) 436-7009.

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