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Greenway extension project progressing

By Tom Joyce
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Little has emerged publicly in recent months about plans for expanding the Granite City Greenway in Mount Airy, but funding and other aspects are coming together to get the project started, a local official says.

"I think it's in pretty good shape," Mayor Ron Niland said Wednesday of an effort to add another 1.2 miles to the cycling, walking and running trail that already covers 6.6 continuous miles through the city. It presently extends southward from Riverside Park along the Ararat River, loops around U.S. 52 and then proceeds north along Lovills Creek to West Lebanon Street.

The project now on the table will take the greenway north toward Jones Intermediate School from the multi-purpose trail's present entrance near the upper picnic shelter at Riverside Park. It will be extended to the area of SouthData Inc. on Technology Lane off Riverside Drive.

State grant funding from various sources has been sought to assist with the cost of this, which has been put at \$1.3 million — covering not only new greenway construction but river restoration along the Ararat and site amenities.

"It's my understanding there's about \$682,000 in the state budget for that," Niland said of the extension project.

"So I feel pretty good about it," the mayor added.

Among the funding assistance available is a \$350,000 grant awarded in late 2020 to Mount Airy from the N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund.

The mayor said he had been advised by city Parks and Recreation Director Darren Lewis that everything needed for the Granite City Greenway expansion is to be in place within the next three to four months, including financing.

However, the actual start of work won't come

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Mount Airy Kiwanis Club turns 100



Submitted photos

Charter members of the Kiwanis Club of Mount Airy gather for a meeting in 1921 at the legendary Blue Ridge Hotel downtown.

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The year was 1921, when the Great War to End All Wars and the Spanish flu epidemic were still fresh in the minds of Mount Airy residents — but they were ready to make history on the local front.

In June 1921, leading citizens of this community gathered downtown in the Blue Ridge Hotel dining room for a meeting to form a local chapter of Kiwanis International, a service organization that had been founded six years before in Detroit.

Those assembled for that century-ago affair could be described as movers and shakers of the community, including Dr. Moir S. Martin, a prominent local surgeon who was chosen as the first president of the fledgling Kiwanis Club of Mount Airy.

A news account of the session pointed out that with the obligatory organizational details taken care of, the club "now expects to get down to real business" — which it did during another well-attended meeting later in June of 1921.

Members had been asked to write on slips of paper their ideas about what Mount Airy needed, which were placed in a box near the front door. Among those suggestions — reported in the June 23, 1921, issue of The Mount Airy News — were some that are outdated by modern standards,

but other relevant ideas are still bearing fruit today:

- One member who had lived in Mount Airy only a short time saw a public library as a major need, saying he had resided in other places with libraries. And not having access to one here seemed to him "an awkward situation which is a drawback to a town that expects to make progress."

- It was the opinion of several members that the club should push for manufacturing enterprises in Mount Airy, including a knitting mill.

- Also along those lines was the suggestion for "an ice plant of sufficient capacity to supply the needs of this section," a necessity in the days before everyone had refrigerators.

- The priority for two local doctors was the establishment of "a more systematic form" of garbage collection locally.

- A number of residents saw the need for better streets and an up-to-date sewage system.

- One local businessman complained about jitneys (buses or others vehicle carrying passengers for a fare), parking in front of stores downtown, saying this practice should be regulated to prevent the hindering of commerce at key times. Such a situation continues today with the presence of delivery trucks.

- In addition to the quality of life, the topic of death was on the minds of those early Kiwanians, specifically the



Bettsee McPhail, who is president of the local Kiwanis Club today, leads a meeting in 2019, with fellow member Steve Lowe also pictured.

method of better caring for "our cemetery" (Oakdale).

"Some thought the town should be in control of it and see that it is made a more attractive place to the honor of all who live here," the newspaper account stated. The municipal government later acquired Oakdale Cemetery on North Main Street.

A public library and better utility and garbage systems also would emerge.

Still active today

The Kiwanis Club of Mount Airy held a Charter Night on Oct. 14, 1921 at the Blue Ridge Hotel, with 48 members certified as its original members.

The modern-day version of the group has seen its

membership numbers dwindle.

"We were up to sixteen at one time, but we've dropped down because of this COVID," said Bettsee McPhail, who has served as president of the Kiwanis Club for three years. Other factors have included deaths, changing times and attrition, with McPhail adding Wednesday that it now has about 10 members.

Yet in turning 100 this year, the local Kiwanis spirit remains strong.

McPhail pointed out that the club has been playing a role in public health through such projects as promoting organ donations through the distribution of armbands to local students.

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Kiwanis

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"That's an ongoing thing," she said, which also has been hampered by the coronavirus due to scheduled visits to high schools in Surry County as part of the "Donate Life" program being canceled.

The Kiwanis Club of Mount Airy also sponsors blood drives, including one on July 22 at the American Red Cross facility on Westlake Drive.

Along with health-related initiatives, McPhail said the club is

eyeing programs focused on helping children, conforming to the main thrust of Kiwanis International, which now has a presence in more than 80 nations and geographic areas.

It is described as a global organization of volunteers "dedicated to changing the world one child and one community at a time" through their various efforts.

"Each community has different needs, and Kiwanis empowers members to pursue creative ways to serve the needs of children, such as fighting hunger, improving literacy and offering guidance," the

Kiwanis International website adds.

The global organization takes on large-scale challenges such as fighting disease and poverty.

"I think our main project is to work with children," McPhail of upcoming plans for local Kiwanians to become involved with middle school students by helping with reading and serving as mentors for youths needing extra attention.

She mentioned that her group also sponsors the Aktion Club at Surry Community College, the only service club for adults with disabilities.

The Kiwanis Club meets on the first and third Tuesday of each month at Gondola Italian Restaurant on West Lebanon Street, which includes dinner and a business session. New members are welcome, according to McPhail, who can be reached at 336-719-6853 for more details.

During its last meeting, the club was visited by a state Kiwanis official, Joanne LeDonne of Clemmons, who is lieutenant

governor of District 5, one of its 26 districts in the Carolinas.

LeDonne urged the local members to maintain their commitment and add

to the rich history of Kiwanis in Mount Airy.

"She really inspired us," McPhail said.

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