

Shovels turn over city's share of Flint River Trail

Summer's work includes two sections of planned 20-mile trail.

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With the sun on their backs and golden shovels in their hands, local officials broke ground Thursday morning on the city's portion of the Flint River Trail.

"A lot of people, a lot of volunteers and professionals have worked a long time to get us here. To see these things move forward is very exciting," said Jim Olson, president of Two Rivers Financial Group, one of six community leaders holding the shovels.

The ceremony attracted a crowd of about 50 onlookers who gathered where the trail will meet Tama Road about a half mile east of Des Moines County 99. Once completed, the full 20-mile trail will stretch from the Burlington riverfront to the Big Hollow Recreation Area.

"This is a fantastic project," said Olson, who is a member of the trail capital campaign committee.

The ceremony kicked off construction of about 1.64 miles of walkway, which is less than half of the approximately 4 miles that will be built by the city. The Burlington City Council earlier this month awarded a contract for the work to Shipley Contracting Corp. of Burlington. Construction is expected to cost \$885,000.

The work to be done this summer includes two sections of trail. The first travels along the North Bottoms Levee from Mill Dam Road east to behind Case New Holland. The other section will run north from Flint Creek to 113th Street. The construction contract lists July 5 as the late start date for construction and allows 75 working days to complete the project.

City officials hope to bid out the next section of trail in early spring 2012. It will consist of a 230-foot walkway that will ascend the bluff between Big Muddy's and Des Moines County 99. The engineering estimate puts the cost at \$150,000, which will be paid for through a REAP grant awarded last year.

Burlington Mayor Bill Ell kicked off the ceremony Thursday with a message of optimism for those who have worked long and hard to bring the project this far.

"Through the joint efforts of Des Moines County, the city of Burlington and the Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission, this thing will become a reality," Ell said. "The reason I'm so extremely excited to see this get done is this will be the first trail of this magnitude to be completed in southeast Iowa."

Related Images:



Burlington Mayor Bill Ell, left, speaks as Des Moines County Supervisor Bob Beck looks on during a ground-breaking ceremony for the City of Burlington's portion of the Flint River Trail Thursday at the intersection of the Flint River Trail and Tama Road.
John Lovretta/The Hawk Eye

Supervisor Bob Beck, who also made public comment, thanked the approximately 20 landowners who granted easements so the trail could pass through their property.

"I think that when their grand-kids come to see them the first time they may not bring a bicycle. But the second time they will," Beck said.

Proud of the work done thus far, Beck said the city and SEIRPC have been great to work with, and he looks forward to seeing the trail completed.

The ground breaking was the second such ceremony for the trail. The previous ground breaking took place in May 2010 and celebrated the beginning of work on a seven-mile section being done by the county. That portion will reach from Big Hollow to the intersection of Flint Bottom Road and North Prairie Grove Road.

The seven miles is expected to cost slightly more than \$1 million and be completed this fall, weather permitting. Unfortunately, persistent rains have hindered work by the contractor, Cole Construction of Keosauqua.

The remainder of the county's trail, expected to cost \$1.7 million, will not be bid until a majority of financing has been procured

Officials expect the full 20-mile trail to be completed by 2013, although meeting that will require procuring additional grants.

A collaboration between the city of Burlington and Des Moines County, the project is expected to cost \$6.45 million. More than 60 percent of that cost, \$3.94 million, already has been secured through a variety of state and federal grants, as well as contributions from the city and county. Officials expect to be awarded a \$150,000 transportation enhancement grant shortly.

The trail capital campaign committee is in the process of trying to raise \$650,000 in community donations. Thus far about \$200,000 has been raised, Olson said. To date, the fund raising committee has focused on soliciting corporate donations but plans in the near future to begin shifting that focus to individuals.

Burlington City Planner Amber VerKuilen and other officials Thursday thanked all the many trail supporters and volunteers who continue to work to bring the dream to fruition.

"I would like to once again thank all of the community supporters, Case New Holland, and the North Bottoms Levee Board for their continued support and cooperation in helping make this project become a reality," said VerKuilen, who does much of the hands-on grant application and other work for the city.

The trail was a part of the Great River Gateway Vision Iowa project, which has providing funding for five community attractions, including improvements to the Big Hollow Recreation Area, constructing the new Burlington Public Library, creation of the new Des Moines County Heritage Center as well as renovations of the Burlington [Memorial Auditorium](#) and Community Field home of the Burlington Bees.

For more information about the trail, including updates and a link to donate, visit www.flintrivertrail.org.