



City seeks state grant for trail

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City officials moved this week to secure financing for a planned recreational trail that will stretch from Burlington's riverfront to the Big Hollow Recreational Area near Sperry.

During regular session Monday, Burlington City Council members gave the go-ahead to the city's planning department to submit an application for a \$150,000 grant offered through the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Funds from the Resource Enhancement and Protection grant program, which will be awarded in November, will be used toward completing the city's portion of the recreation trail.

"The city and the county are working together to make this trail a reality," said Joe Haley, associate city planner. "Most of the money needed to complete this trail will come from grants."

The total cost of the city's four-mile section of the 21-mile trail is about \$1.2 million, with \$5.2 million needed to complete the remainder of the project.

The first phase of the city's portion includes a mile from the Port of Burlington to the shuttered Burlington Basket Co. building.

"Case (New Holland), Bluff Harbor Marina and other land owners have been very cooperative," Haley said. "This is a project that residents can be excited about."

For the county's part, 19 of 24 land easements needed to complete the trail have been secured. After the trail is constructed, the county will abate property taxes on the easements. The abatements will cost the county about \$1,500 annually.

"The county has been very successful working with property owners to secure these easements," said Kris Ackerson of the Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission.

Ackerson said it's too early to set a timetable for construction, however, he hasn't ruled out work beginning in 2008.

"It will be contingent on financing and finalizing the route. We could see construction may be a year from now, but that's not set in stone," he said.

In a related matter, the city followed suit with the county in adopting Flint River Recreation Trail as the project's official name. The measure was more than just symbolic, according to Haley.

"It puts both the city and the county on the same page," he said. "It gives residents a name to rally behind."