

APPENDIX B — West Pender Rail-Trail Alliance Community Feedback Report, prepared by Susan Bullers, Ph.D.

WEST PENDER RAIL-TRAIL ALLIANCE COMMUNITY FEEDBACK REPORT

April 8, 2009

This report was created for the West Pender Rail-Trail Alliance, the Pender County Planning Department, Pender County Commissioners and County Manager, the National Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, the citizens of Pender County, and especially those who live in the Currie and Atkinson communities. Thank you to all participants for sharing your opinions about this project.

Susan Bullers Ph.D.
Assoc. Prof., Dept. of Sociology and Criminal Justice
University of North Carolina Wilmington
601 South College Road
Wilmington, NC 28403-5978
910.962.7150
Bullerss@uncw.edu

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The West Pender Rail-Trial is a non-profit community initiative to preserve and enhance the quality of life in western Pender, New Hanover, and Sampson Counties by converting an abandoned railroad corridor into a multi-use community heritage trail.

Results from this report were compiled from survey data collected during a three-day community information and feedback event at Moores Creek Battlefield National Park on March 28th, 29th and 30th, 2009. A project description and letter of invitation (appendix) to this event were mailed to 200 landowners and nearby residents of the proposed trail corridor in Pender County. The event was also announced in the Wilmington Star-News and through email messages to interested groups. The final sample included 45 respondents and does not represent all concerned citizens.

The majority of respondents were in favor of the project. Among landowners and those who currently have a financial interest in the land, support was strongest among those who owned large tracts of land. Opposition was strongest among those who currently lived or worked on land adjacent to the corridor. The main concerns were that trail users would not stay on the trail; the trail ran too close to their homes, that there would be an increase in crime on the trail, and that it would interfere with hunting access. Although some residents were opposed to this project, they generally supported the concept of a trail and wanted more recreational facilities in the area. Some suggested that they would favor the trail if it ran along the roadway in the same neighborhood- but not through their property. Most of these concerns are common in initial rail-trail project efforts and been addressed successfully on other trails.

Mapping of supporters suggests that initial support would be strongest for Phase I; from the New Hanover County line to about Montague Road. Most opposition was along hunting land from Montague to just South of Currie,

and again in some residential areas near Currie and Atkinson. It is possible that completion of Phase I would introduce the benefits and alleviate the major concerns for such a trail and feasibility for Phase II could be re-visited in the future. Some sections that do not appear feasible may be able to find alternate routes along the roadways.

All final comments were positive statements of support for the effort, one included concerns about funding and one included concerns about getting community support.

SAMPLE

Most people who came to the open house meetings completed the survey. Attendees included local recipients of the mailing, a group of cyclists from the Cape Fear Cyclist Club and a few others who had read about the project from the Star-News. There were 45 respondents and all but one reported that they had a chance to look over the materials presented at the information tent (the one respondent did not answer this item).

General Views of Project by Relation to Corridor Land

Views	Total Sample	(%)	Own Land	(%)	Rent/Lease Land	(%)	Work on/ Manage Land	(%)
STRONGLY OPPOSE	5	(11.4)	2	(33.3)	2	(100)	2	(100)
UNDECIDED	1	(2.3)	1	(16.7)	0		0	
LEANING TOWARD FAVORING	2	(4.5)	2	(33.3)	0		0	
STRONGLY FAVOR	36	(81.8)	1	(16.7)	0		0	
TOTAL RESPONSES	44	(100)	6	(100)	2	(100)	2	(100)

(None of the respondents chose the “leaning toward opposed” category)

The majority of all respondents were in favor of the project while about one third of the landowners were opposed. (Two additional large-tract non-resident landowners not included here have previously indicated support for the project and informal conversations have revealed that additional

resident landowners are opposed to the project.) Results suggest that large-tract landowners are more likely to be in favor while individual resident landowners and those who rent, lease or work on the land in the corridor are more likely to be opposed.

RESPONDENT LISTED USES:

Use	Count	% of respondents
WALKING	23	51.1
RUNNING/JOGGING	14	31.1
BICYCLING	36	80.0
HORSEBACK RIDING	3	6.7
WILDLIFE/NATURE VIEWING	17	37.8
WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBILITY	3	6.7
OTHER ("HUNTING," "EASEMENT")	2	4.0

(45 total respondents)

Bicycling was the most frequently listed use, followed by walking, wildlife/nature viewing, and running/jogging. There were a few equestrians and a few looking for wheelchair access activities.

PERCEPTIONS OF MOST IMPORTANT BENEFIT:

Benefit	Count	% of respondents
RECREATION/HEALTH	37	82.2
ECONOMIC	19	42.2
TRANSPORTATION	10	22.2
BUILDING COMMUNITY	14	31.1
HISTORIC PRESERVATION	25	55.6
ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION	28	62.2

(45 total respondents)

Recreation/health was the most frequently cited benefit followed by environmental preservation, historic preservation, and economic growth. There were two negatives comments offered here; "problems" and "no benefits."

The most common concerns offered were;

Users wouldn't stay on trail (3)

Hunting access or activities would be compromised (2)

Trash (1)

Crime (1)

Too close to own home (2)

RESPONDENTS' CURRENT PUBLIC RECREATION USE INCLUDED:

Benefit	Count	% of respondents
PUBLIC PARKS	29	64.4
PUBLIC TRAILS	23	51.1
PUBLIC BEACHES	31	68.9
ANY PUBLIC	41	91.1
PRIVATE LAND/FACILITIES	11	24.4

(45 total respondents)

- The most commonly used parks were local urban (15) followed by regional (9), state (3), national (2) and Moores Creek specifically (2). All beaches listed were local.
- Nineteen instances of out-of-state rail-trails were listed, including the Virginia Creeper (Va.), New River (Va.), C&O (Md.), Greenbrier, Alleghany(Pa.), Nashua Valley (Mass.) and Minuteman (Mass.), Pinecreek (Pa.), Erie Canal (N.Y.), Cape Cod (Mass.) and Leigh.
- Thirty-nine out of forty-one respondents (95.1%) would like to see more public recreation facilities in the area. By far the most frequently listed types of facilities included trails and bike-friendly amenities (19).

ECONOMIC INTERESTS

Eleven respondents answered YES (6) or MAYBE (5) to having an interest in starting or expanding a trail-related business. One landowner was interested solely in how this trail could benefit him economically. His land was ideally situated for trail-related businesses. This is a substantial number of respondents (about ¼ of all respondents) expressing a business interest in the trail.

HISTORY

Six respondents answered YES (3) or NOT SURE (3) to having historical photos, artifacts, or personal history regarding this railroad. Conversations with local community members over the course of the event revealed a rich, colorful, and long history of the railroad and the area in general. Several residents seemed especially knowledgeable about this history and we all felt that these personal histories should be documented.