

HIKERS AND BIKERS REJOICE!

By William Nicoson

If getting from Reston to Fairfax City by car becomes too frustrating, Fairfax County has planned a trail that will permit you to walk or bike there leisurely through nature rather than languish in the fits and starts of wall-to-wall vehicles.

The County Board of Supervisors on January 10 approved a plan for a Cross County Trail of 31.5 miles from Great Falls in the north to Alban Road in the south passing through all nine magisterial districts and utilizing 26.7 miles of existing paths. The trail enters the southeast corner of Reston, crosses Twin Branch Road and turns south crossing Lawyers Road. Existing pathways of the Reston Association (RA) in the area are proposed to be incorporated into the Cross County Trail.

The Board approved funding of \$100,000 (carried forward from last year), estimated to be adequate for development of the first 5 phases of the trail. While the plan describes the Cross County Trail as passing "from Great Falls to Alban Road," the funding has been allocated in reverse, starting with Mt. Vernon District in phase 1 and ending with Hunter Mill and Dranesville Districts in phase 8. That means County funding for Reston's portion of the trail has yet to be approved. Surprisingly, the disparity in funding approval for only 5 of 8 phases was not discussed by the Board on January 10.

Bill Cuttler, Planning Chief for the County Park Authority, tells me that the south to north funding direction was chosen by the staff because the less expensive improvements in the south would permit more rapid progress than beginning in the north. In addition to the \$1.165 million in bond funding approved last year for 3 trail projects, the tab for remaining trail development in northern phases (including Reston) may be as high as \$2.1 million. Co-option by the County of RA pathways raises several financial issues unmentioned in the County plan which must be resolved before the eventual development of phase 8.

First, the County will no doubt agree to defray the costs of signing as a Cross County Trail any Reston pathways incorporated into the County system. Less certain is whether the County will agree to reimburse a portion of the capital costs for RA development of these pathways. More certain is that the County should agree to pay a percentage of the future maintenance costs of the shared pathways. In a perfect world, the percentage would be calculated as the ratio of visitors to residents, but the costs of monitoring use of the pathways make this solution unlikely. Splitting the difference is more practical.

Finally, the Cross County Trail will attract hikers and bikers who may be so intrigued by the natural wonders of Reston (evidenced by last Sunday's Washington Post magazine celebrating the photography of Charles Veatch's book, "Nature in Reston") that they will branch into other connecting RA pathways in search of discovery. What share of capital and maintenance costs for

the entire Reston pathway system should the County assume to support the aesthetic and athletic gratification of visitors introduced by the Cross County Trail? That's an easier question to ask than to answer. When negotiations begin, the wise men and women of the County and of RA will surely come to a reasonable solution. Meanwhile let all advocates of muscle-power mobility give 3 cheers for County approval of a project initiated by citizens who like to hike and bike.

William Nicoson is a former director of the Reston Association and a former publisher of Connection Newspapers.