

Work on plaza and trail begins.

The project at Metropolitan, part of Mecklenburg's first linear park, is scheduled to be completed this summer.

By Karen Sullivan
ksullivan@charlotteobserver.com
Posted: Sunday, Jan. 04, 2009



Construction started last week on a park plaza and greenway trail at Metropolitan, a mixed-use development just outside the center city that is home to Target and a Home Depot Design Center.

The plaza and trail, beside Little Sugar Creek and visible from condos facing Kenilworth Avenue at Metropolitan, are components of Mecklenburg County's first linear park. The strip of land for the park follows along both sides of the creek at Kenilworth. The park stretches from Charlottetowne Avenue to just beyond what was once Baxter Street.

Baxter Street between Kenilworth and Kings Drive was closed for the expansive development at Metropolitan.

Construction is scheduled to be completed this summer, giving residents near the center city an alternate method of transportation.

"They can bike it, they can walk it, they can jog it," Greenway planner Gwen Cook said of the trail. "They have another way to get to work that doesn't involve a vehicle."

The county will invest about \$2.8 million for park amenities, stream restoration, landscaping and other improvements.

The plaza and seating will be on a terraced area surrounding a wall fountain facing Kenilworth. Stairways and ramps are in place so that visitors can move between the plaza and trail to Metropolitan's shops, restaurants and residences on an upper terrace.

"The two projects just flow together, and that was our goal," Cook said.

The greenway is an essential element in creating the mixed-use environment at the former Midtown Square shopping center site, said Peter Pappas, president of Pappas Properties, one of three development partners at Metropolitan.

Before redevelopment, the Midtown Square parking lot covered the creek, which was polluted from decades of dumping, Cook said.

The site has been cleaned up as part of the project improvements. The county also is doing restoration work along the creek banks.

"Mecklenburg County's plan to build this greenway was a driver for us building the residential housing," Pappas said. "It would have been extremely challenging to create a residential environment without uncapping the creek."

Later phases of construction would extend Little Sugar Creek Greenway farther north and south by about 2 miles.

Possibly as early as 2010, Park and Recreation plans to extend the greenway along Little Sugar Creek to Central Piedmont Community College's new culinary building, under construction at Kings Drive and Seventh Street, Cook said.

South of Metropolitan, the linear park and trail would continue to Morehead Street. That stretch also is scheduled to be completed this summer.

The route would continue south from Metropolitan under a new bridge at Pearl Park Way. The Charlotte Department of Transportation is building the new street and bridge to connect Kenilworth Avenue and Kings Drive, replacing Baxter Street.

Beyond Pearl Park Way, the trail to Morehead Street will include a second plaza and fountain, seating areas and public art.

A pedestrian bridge is planned over the greenway at Harding Place. A clock tower is planned at Kings and Morehead.

Once the new trail is completed to Morehead Street, greenway visitors could continue less than three-quarters of a mile to Freedom Park or about 2.5 miles to Woodlawn Road at the Park Road Shopping Center.

"It's for recreation and it's to get people into alternative transportation systems," Cook said. "It's a different way of urban living."