

Park Hills pining for walkers, bicyclists

By LINDA CONLEY
Staff Writer

An expert on making communities more walker-friendly told Park Hills' residents that slowing down traffic and adding green spaces in their neighborhood could easily become the spark to revive the entire area.

Dan Burden, executive director of Walkable Communities Inc., addressed the group during a community meeting Monday night. He is in Spartanburg to suggest ways to make city streets more accessible for pedestrians and bicyclists.

A study released recently indicated almost half of the city streets are not user-friendly. HeartWise, a nonprofit group working to promote physical activity and healthy commu-

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ Slow down traffic to present a calmer atmosphere
- ◆ Add green spaces
- ◆ Open access to school playground by doing away with chain link fence

nities, evaluated the streets and is working with other nonprofit organizations such as Upstate Forever, a group promoting sensible growth, to help sponsor Burden's services.

Park Hills' residents want to become the first neighborhood to make changes accommodating walkers and cyclists because they believe the efforts could help them begin a larger revitalization movement to

attract more families and businesses.

Rodney S. Tucker, one of the meeting organizers, said the idea is to begin improvements by enhancing the neighborhood's natural features. One idea is to build walking trails along Fairforest Creek, which winds through the middle of the community.

"Park Hills has some beautiful natural places, valleys and streams," Burden said. "It has the right elements to replenish what it has lost."

Burden arrived on Saturday and walked around the neighborhood. During Monday's meeting at Silver Hill Memorial United Methodist Church, he made recommendations to a group of about 20 residents.

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To help improve neighborhood, build partnerships, expert says

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He said one of the first priorities should be to slow down traffic to make it a calmer neighborhood because speeding in residential areas depletes property values. He also said neighbors don't tend to get to know each other in areas with traffic problems.

Suggestions for reducing the speed included building refuge islands, reshaping intersections along with other changes.

Tucker also said the neighborhood needs ideas for beautifying and making recreational equipment more accessible. One of his suggestions is to tear down some of the heavy chain link fencing around Park Hills Elementary School so residents can use the playground.

"Park Hills is under siege with all of the chain fencing, and I would like for the neighborhood to be able to use the basketball courts and other playground equipment," Tucker said. "Other elementary schools in the county don't have heavy chain link fences that make it impossible to use the playground equipment."

Tucker, a planner with the city of Greenville, hopes the neighborhood can establish partnerships with agencies, businesses, foundations and other organizations to help fund some of the improvements. He said establishing partnerships is the best way to begin because city officials are more focused on redeveloping downtown.

Once the neighborhood begins making improvements, Tucker believes city officials will take notice and become involved. "The squeaky wheel gets the oil," he said.

Ann Day, one of the meeting organizers and president of the neighborhood watch, said the neighborhood needs more sidewalks and other measures to make it more walker friendly. She said the area has not had any real problems over the years, but many would like it to become a more active and close-knit neighborhood.

"I would like to see Park Hills become more of a neighborhood again," she said.

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