Radford Pathways proposal unveiled to members
The plan must be approved by city staff and council before it is put into place.

By Lindsay Key
381-1671

Pathways for Radford President Liz Altieri now holds in her hands a conceptual linkages plan for the city, which she said could guide decision-making for the next 10 years.

Employees of the Community Design Assistance Center at Virginia Tech presented drafts of the plan to Pathways members Wednesday night.

Pathways and the city hired the design center in August to gather and compile data that would help determine where to place future biking and walking paths. Over the last six months, design center employees met with Pathways members and city staff to walk existing trails. A survey was distributed city-wide in November to determine the location priorities of the community.

Design center employee Kim Watson shared preliminary survey results during the first half of the meeting Wednesday night, but said Thursday the results as a whole are inconclusive -- for now. Minor adjustments in data entry are needed to better calculate some answers. Approximately 400 people responded to the survey.

The second half of the meeting was devoted to unveiling the draft of the master plan, presented by design center employees Will Belcher and Chris Shern. The Pathways plan was consistent with an earlier open space plan the center drafted for the city.

Watson said the plan will not be available to the public until after it can be reviewed by Assistant City Manager David Ridpath and City Engineer Jim Hurt in mid-March.

But the plan unveiled Wednesday includes a bike lane that would extend the entire length of Main Street, and a considerable amount of bike lane linkages in the city's western neighborhoods.

Some Pathways members are especially interested in developing trails in the west.

"On city council, we hear from citizens who say the western end doesn't have as much access," said councilwoman and Pathways secretary Laurie Buchwald. "Expansion to the west end is a way to unify."

Altieri said that drafters of the first Pathways plan in 1998 had the intent of connecting both the east and...
west ends of the city, but money ran out. Now, with a new vision in place and a few pennies in the jar from fund-raisers, Pathways hopes to accomplish that goal.

Both Buchwald and Altieri said after the meeting that their number one priority is entire city connectivity, making it easier for citizens to navigate to the places they "live, work, play, and learn."

Their second priority is regional connectivity. A proposed linkage from the city to Fairlawn via an abandoned railroad trestle across the New River would make connecting to Montgomery County more feasible.

"It's all about regionalism now," Buchwald said.

The third priority that Buchwald and Altieri identified is the economic benefit of connecting trails to local businesses. The trails might also serve as a reason for recreation enthusiasts to come to the city and subsequently shop.

"I've gone to conferences where we look at what brings people to communities, and bikeways and walkways are huge," Buchwald said.

Despite the excitement surrounding the completion of the master plan draft, Watson said Thursday that the plan is only two-thirds done.

"We received the feedback we were looking for and we will probably have one more round of review before we submit final drawings" to the city, Watson said.

Once the plan passes through the hands of Pathways members and city staff, the plan will go before city council.

Buchwald said its future there is uncertain, considering the other two major funding projects that loom in the distance -- school renovations, and the Second Avenue widening project.

"It's so early in the process, so it's hard to make an assumption so far," she said.