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Carbon commissioners approve hiking, bike trail change orders

By JIM DINO
Staff Writer

JIM THORPE — A new hiking and biking trail that will keep tourists safe and eventually connect to other trails, including Greater Hazleton's, is now open between Nesquehoning and Jim Thorpe.

The Carbon County commissioners last week approved two change orders that will virtually wrap up the project.

S&K Construction, Tobyhanna, the firm that built the trail, requested an additional \$4,505.70 for additional surfacing areas and split-rail fencing for pull-off areas, making the new contract total \$332,374.98.

Also, Clough, Harbor and Associates, King of Prussia, which designed the trail, asked for an additional \$5,200 for additional services, increasing its not-to-exceed fee from \$18,500 to \$23,700.

County Administrator Randy Smith said the county took on the project to improve safety for tourists.

"The trail is 1.4 miles, and connects Lehigh Gorge State Park to downtown Jim Thorpe," Smith said. "People who wanted to go

from Lehigh Gorge State Park to Jim Thorpe were riding their bikes along Route 903, then over the bridge to Route 209. It was a dangerous situation. The trail gets those people off the highways."

The Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, which retraces the path of coal from mine to market to fuel the Industrial Revolution, is finishing a 165-mile trail from Bristol, Bucks County to Wilkes-Barre, using old Lehigh and Delaware canal towpaths and abandoned rail lines.

Smith said the county trail is near the D&L trail, and the two will be connected in about three years.

"It is very important to link our trail with the D&L Heritage trail," Smith said. "The Weissport-Jim Thorpe section of their trail is on the other side of the railroad tracks, and our trail is on this side (closer to the courthouse and Jim Thorpe). The D&L has the money and planning to build a pedestrian bridge over the railroad, to connect the two paths."

Smith said it has taken four years to develop and build the county trail because of a dispute with a landowner, but that it was worth the wait

Commissioner Wayne Nothstein agrees the new trail is about scenery as much as it's about safety.

"What's more scenic for the bike rider than riding on the trail?" Nothstein said. "Yes, it's a safety issue. But it's more attractive for our tourists to ride."

Another significance of the new trail is that it will also eventually connect with the Greater Hazleton Rails-To-Trails, which is also planned to go to Lehigh Gorge State Park.

The Hazleton trail will link with the D&L trail, and may also include a "loop" trail that goes to Weatherly

Other business

The commissioners also:

- Agreed to pay an additional \$2,359.35, on a change order, to Asphalt Paving Systems, Lehigh- ton, for the paving of Cortright Street in Lansford. The total contract is now \$50,417.10.

- Appointed Kim Miller, Cheri Santore and Edward Hawk to three-year terms as Carbon County representatives to the Pocono Counties Workforce Investment Board.

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