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## Trail project could link northwest parks

Extension would add Kickerillo area

By KIM JACKSON

A group of Champion Forest-area water district officials and residents are looking into launching a green-trail project that could link Harris County's Elizabeth Kaiser Meyer Park with the proposed Kickerillo Mischer Preserve park at Texas 249 and Cypresswood Drive.

Harris County Precinct 4 is working on a trail project between Collins and Meyer parks, so the extension of that trail is a logical and desirable project, the group said.

The Cypress Forest Public Utility District board voted last month to create a committee made up of district officials, residents and property owners to consider a trail project, including how much it would cost and how it would be financed; what path the trail would take; and how best to work with property owners along the project path.

"This could be an amenity for our neighborhood, and it could serve as a buffer between our community and future development," said Tom Petrick, a Cypress Forest PUD board member and committee member. "We need to get this into play. We need to link our parks, and tie into the exciting development that is happening around us."

Petrick said the committee would bring a final report and recommendation to the board in February. If the project is to be wholly or partially financed with bonds sold by the Cypress Forest PUD, an election could be called as early as May 2008.

The committee will utilize a nature trail feasibility study conducted for the water district by local landscape consultant Michael Murr.

Murr 's study results mapped out one possibility for the two-mile asphalt trail path. It would start at Meyer Park and run southwest along Cypress Creek over Dry Gulley. At that point the trail breaks away from the creek to run along the back of two properties that border Cypresswood Drive east of Champion Forest Drive. One property houses the Houston Conservatory Senior Living Apartments and the other is owned by Greenwood Properties.

The proposed trail then follows an existing path under Champion Forest Drive, runs behind property owned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and then follows a path along Cypresswood Drive in front of the Raveneaux Country Club and Golf Course, which is owned by JP Raveneaux Partners, Ltd.

The trail joins up again with Cypress Creek at a point where the creek runs under Cypresswood Drive, follows an existing path under Cypresswood, and then crosses a gulley and ends at the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad tracks adjacent to the 460-acre master-planned "The Vintage" development. The Vintage is being developed by V&W Partners, a joint venture between the Kickerillo Cos. and Mischer Investments. V&W Partners is in the process of donating about 100 acres at the southern end of the property, bordering Cypress Creek, to Harris County for a public park.

"We are very fortunate to have a palette to work with," Murr said. "We can take what God gave us and put a trail through it for everyone to enjoy. The beautiful greenbelt is already there for us. We would just put a bow on it."

Murr said the proposed trail is just a proposal and it would be altered to follow the parcels of land the district is able to acquire for the project. He said a strip of land about 20-feet wide would be ideal in which to build a 10-foot-wide trail with landscaping along the edges.

Petrick said the committee would focus on bringing property owners to the table to talk about those right-of-way donations and/or acquisitions. He said the majority of the path runs through the Raveneaux property, which will be redeveloped.

Champions Forest resident and Raveneaux property owner Tony Kindred has joined forces with developer JP Realty Co. to develop 42 acres of the 288-acre site that now houses Raveneaux Country Club and two 18-hole golf courses. Preliminary plans call for brownstone-style townhomes, and a new six-story clubhouse facility with condominium units on the upper three floors.

Neither Kindred nor Mark Jordan with JP Realty returned calls for comment about the trail project.

"The present owner does have knowledge of the plan and agrees with the concept, but we have no agreement in place," Petrick said.

Murr said the committee could also talk with Harris County officials about future maintenance of the trail, as well as the possibility of obtaining park bond money if a Harris County bond election gets voter approval in November.

Dennis Johnston, Harris County Precinct 4's parks director, said the project sounds like a good one, but Harris County bond funds could be hard to come because of all of the demands there will be for Precinct 4's estimated \$23 million slice of the park bond fund pie.

"We don't know how it will be distributed. It is a big precinct and there is a lot going on," Johnston said. "We need funds to develop the Kickerillo Mischer Preserve, and money will be needed to expand the Cypress Creek Greenway. A lot of things are up in the air."

Champion Forest resident Rozann Janek, who is vice president of the Champion Forest Fund Inc. and a committee member, said the homeowners association has a strong interest in the trail project.

"We realize that change is inevitable, so it is our responsibility to communicate our community's need for respectful consideration in the process," Janek said.