

Ride your bike through an art gallery?

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Thousands of bikers, joggers and walkers use Polk Hill Trail in Greenwood every year.

The stretch of trail is a gateway to Craig Park and the Old Town area and has been identified as one of the most popular walkways in the city.

But for all its use, the pathway doesn't offer much for people to look at as they pass by.

Starting this spring, that will change.

Polk Hill Trail soon will feature three sculptures by nationally recognized artists. With the help of a \$2,500 grant and corporate sponsorship, the parks department and local arts groups plan to have the pieces installed on the trail along Smith Valley Road by April.

Organizers are reaching out to artists throughout the country to commission the best designs, helping to expand Greenwood's reputation as an arts-friendly city.

"The interaction between the nature of that area and the artwork itself, as well as the people along the trail, will be an important addition for the city. Culturally, this is a win for Greenwood," said Rob Taggart, Greenwood's director of parks.

The artwork will be

installed on a stretch of the trail just east of Craig Park for the next two years. After the exhibition closes in March 2014, organizers will determine whether to continue the program and call out for a new round of art.

The project was envisioned by the parks department as a way to increase use of the trail system and beautify the public greenways in the city, Taggart said.

He brought the idea to the Greater Greenwood Arts Council, which saw an opportunity to introduce artistic expression to people who might not go to an art show or fair.

"We hope this is a catalyst for the community to become more involved in the arts and be an opportunity to unify everyone under the umbrella of the arts," said Angela Stelljes, the project facilitator.

The two entities have worked together for the past year to put together funding and sponsorship in order to make the art trail a reality.

The exhibition project will cost \$13,900. Most of that will be provided by Franciscan Alliance, which is the trail's major sponsor.

An additional \$2,500 was provided by a grant from the Johnson County Community Foundation, with other sponsors contributing to help support the project.

Each artist will be awarded \$3,000, the cost to lease the work for two years. Using that money, the artist is responsible for installation costs, as well as any equipment that might be required to set it up.

Park department funds will not be used on the project, although Greenwood will contribute land along the trail for its installation, Taggart said.

Parks workers also will prepare the site for the artwork to be installed, though the extent of the work will depend on the size and scope of each piece, he said.

The Greater Greenwood Arts Council has started reaching out to art groups and nonprofit organizations asking for ideas for the trail. Council members will continue to do so for the next two weeks.

Artists have until Feb. 15 to apply and submit designs.

A committee of five people, composed of local artists, art teachers and a landscape architect, will decide which pieces are the best fit for the trail.

The criteria will center on artwork that is appropriate for the general public, with a style that is fitting to a city park, said Jim Stockman, president of the arts council.

“One of the things about art is it helps to bring good feeling to people. We think it will unite the community and will bring a good feeling to the community, so they have something to enjoy while they walk the trail,” he said.

Each piece needs to be highly durable, because it will be outdoors, and safe for people walking by or playing around. The artwork needs to be complete and ready to transport this spring.

“We just want to make sure it's appropriate for our community and it fits the spaces we're looking at. We're attentive to Greenwood and what would be appropriate with a first-time project,” Stelljes said.

Final choices will be made in mid-March, and the parks department will begin preparing the sites for installation. An opening celebration is tentatively scheduled for the end of April.

Though the project is just starting, organizers already have started looking at ways to make it bigger.

Discussions are ongoing about continuing the project with new works of art after two years or expanding it to other sections of trail.

“You never know with a project this large what will come of it. What we hope for now is that it unifies the community, gets conversation started, gets people to notice art that is already happening,” she said.

Photo Caption: Thousands of bikers, joggers and walkers use Polk Hill Trail in Greenwood every year.

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