

Return on Environmental Investment (ROEI) is Big

by Jason Strand, Alumni Fellow
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Founder and president of Greenways Incorporated Charles Flink spoke to a group of about 400 Tuesday night at Younts Conference Center.

His presentation, "The Economic Benefits of Greenways for Greenville County," examined the potential economic value that would be created in Greenville County with the development of a comprehensive greenway trail network.

The event, co-sponsored by The Riley Institute and Upstate Forever, examined the key economic benefits in terms of value added, costs avoided and opportunities created for communities by greenways and green spaces.

Citing numerous examples from his work planning green spaces for communities around the world, Flink encouraged members of the audience to consider themselves stewards for Greenville's future, not victims. "You are in the driver's seat today," said Flink. "This is your chance to make a determination."

Greenville is planning a "rails to trails" program that would convert a 13-mile abandoned rail line that connects Travelers Rest to downtown Greenville into a trail for hikers, runners and cyclists.. Businesses, restaurants and parks already along this corridor would profit from the increase in human activity. Naturally, further business will be attracted.

"There are a lot opportunities if we can think creatively about generating revenues from the creation of greenway systems," said Flink.

Fink said green spaces help increase property value, reduce the chances of flooding and attract economic activity. Some studies even suggest green spurs physical activity. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) encourages the creation of Active Community Environments (ACEs) which are green spaces that promote physical activities. Fink said his company recently partnered with planners in Greensboro, N.C. to create such a plan.

Greenways Incorporated data collection across Greenville County and the United States suggests that a large number of people are very interested in creating and preserving green spaces. However, many are concerned with how the funding of such initiatives can work.

Given the proven revenue creation of communities already involved with green space projects, Flink suggests that investments in such initiatives must be considered an essential part of a community's economic picture.