

## **Polk appearance commission designs entrance landscaping**

*From the Tryon Daily Bulletin article published Wednesday, May 12 2010*

The Polk County Appearance Commission has preliminary designs to dress up the county's entrances with trees and plantings.

The appearance commission's Joe Cooper and Mark Byington presented plans to the Polk County Board of Commissioners last Monday. Byington, who gave a powerpoint presentation that included before and proposed "photoshop" after pictures, said there is currently no funding available nor approval, but the commission has designed ideas to improve some sections of the county.

The areas included in Byington's power point focused particularly on the entrance into Columbus on Hwy. 108 coming off U.S. 74, the Columbus business district coming off I-26 and the entrance into Tryon from Landrum on U.S. 176. Before and after pictures were shown of the entrances and what the entrances could look like with trees along the rights of way in front of businesses.

Other ideas include working with property owners of the bigger stores, such as BiLo and Food Lion in Columbus and the Family Dollar plaza in Tryon to do plantings within the parking lots.

"It's not just about the appearance," Byington told commissioners, "the benefits of street trees goes beyond that."

He included facts about the benefits of plantings, including reducing storm water runoff, improved water quality, increasing groundwater recharge, slowing traffic, reducing air pollution and improved psychological well being.

"Trees enhance the community's economic stability by attracting businesses and tourists," Byington said.

Byington said the commission is looking at tough trees that would be the least maintenance. It was mentioned that an endowment fund could be established and a local contractor hired to maintain the plantings.

Byington and Cooper said the appearance commission is working with the N.C. Department of Transportation (DOT), which will have to be involved given rights of way and some ingress and egress issues. The state line site particularly would involve taking up pavement in some areas, filling in dirt and then adding plantings.

Cooper said the DOT has some funding available, but it would be best if the county already had funding set aside for the project. Commissioners suggested that the topic be one at joint meetings that will begin next month with the county, Tryon, Columbus and Saluda.

"I'm looking forward to getting together with our towns and showing decisive leadership on this," said commissioner vice-chair Ray Gasperson.

The appearance commission also recently worked with the DOT to design landscaping along the banks of I-26 coming into Columbus that is currently being done.