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Vernon Bryant/Staff Photographer
The Chalk Hill Trail will follow an abandoned rail line through west Oak Cliff. The hike-and-bike path will offer elevation changes, rock escarpments and picturesque views in a little-known area of Dallas.

A road less-traveled through Oak Cliff

Abandoned rail line will have company again with proposed Chalk Hill Trail

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A proposed hike-and-bike trail through one of Dallas' most scenic, and often overlooked, areas is heading down the path to construction.

Dallas County commissioners last week OK'd \$3.7 million to help build the Chalk Hill Trail, approving an agreement with the city of Dallas to

develop the four-mile corridor in west Oak Cliff.

The trail, long a focus for County Commissioner Elba Garcia, would follow an abandoned railroad line north from DART's Westmoreland Station to around the intersection of West Davis Street and Chalk Hill Road.

Runners and cyclists are still a few years away from enjoying the path — probably 2017, at the earliest.

The Dallas Park and Recreation Board and the City Council still must

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consider the agreement, which calls for a city commitment of more than \$2.5 million for land acquisition. And the design could be tricky, as the corridor features old railroad trestles and some erosion problems.

But the completed trail would provide a rare combination — rare in North Texas, anyway — of elevation changes, rock escarpments and picturesque views.

"A lot of people aren't familiar with that part of the city," said Rick Loessberg, the county's planning and development director. "It's a way cool project."

The Chalk Hill Trail would follow an old spur of the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railway. That stretch starts south of Illinois Avenue, then snakes past Cockrell Hill, the Dallas National Golf Club, Arcadia Heights and Pinnacle Park.

It's likely that the trail would be built in phases. There isn't currently enough money for the whole thing, and some costs could vary, depending on how much work is needed for various overpasses in the corridor.

Officials are still determining which portion they would build first. They think they could start with two or three miles of trail.

County officials anticipate

having another \$2.5 million for the trail in 2016. That would potentially allow for the completion of all four miles. When it's done, the city of Dallas would take over operations and maintenance.

"It will be the main hike-and-bike corridor in Oak Cliff," said Michael Hellman, assistant director of the city's Park and Recreation Department.

The project is particularly appealing to county and city officials because of its potential for "connectivity."

The hope is that the north end of Chalk Hill Trail would eventually feed into the Coombs Creek Trail, which runs along Interstate 30 and

is slated to connect into downtown Dallas. And on the southern end, planners want to link Chalk Hill with the east-west Five Mile Creek Trail.

Those connections are down the road. But officials said they were already excited about the prospect of anchoring a substantial amount of trail to DART's Westmoreland station, allowing the path to be part of a broader transportation network.

"More than anything, it's a connector," said Garcia, who represents most of western Dallas County.

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Staff Graphic