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Bike trail gets second breath

Trail enthusiasts gathered May 8, 2019, at the Alcona Township hall, Black River, Michigan, for a preliminary discussion about creating a non-motorized pathway connecting Oscoda and Alpena. The invited group was a list based on previous or current involvement in trail discussions and included all the local units of government, state officials, community and economic development groups, local businesses and trail advocates,

With a grant from Coastal Zone Management Program garnered by the Northeast Michigan Council of Governments (NEMCOG), Emily Meyerson, an independent planning consultant with a background in trail planning and development, is facilitating the process. Meyerson and NEMCOG's Steve Schnell, Community and Economic Development Planner, led the discussion. The idea of a trail between Oscoda and Alpena has been on the wish list for representatives of the US 23 Heritage Route for quite some time as it will enhance the recreational opportunities along the route.

"I know the late Karen Sanderson would be in her words 'geeked' by this news," says attendee Marlena Mac Neill, whom sat in on the May 8th meeting and represented Alcona County along with Sanderson on the Heritage Route Advisory Council beginning in early 2000.

"We couldn't seem to get the idea to grow, although the path through Harrisville State Park and the City of Harrisville was sparked by the Alcona Heritage Route group in part due to Karen's enthusiasm and energy. And now, after all these years, there's hope for continuation of the trail," said Mac Neill. "So I, too, am excited to learn the idea is getting a second breath."

The discussion revealed that factors and influences have changed for the positive in relation to building non-motorized trails over the years. Statistical data showing both economic benefits and increased safety benefits are now documented, helping to pave the way for new facility development. “Trails typically increase property values, local economic vitality including trail-oriented development, and a general trend toward better physical and mental health thru recreational and physical activity,” Meyerson said. Meyerson added “With this documented benefits, non-motorized facilities and trails have grown throughout the nation and different types of facilities are now more accepted than 10 years ago. In Michigan, trails are now being developed within active rail corridors and on existing roadways”.

The grant funded project goal is to develop a publicly supported trail route based on feasibility to construct, costs and the best location for both transportation and recreation uses. Part of the plan for trail development is the long-term management and maintenance of such a facility.

Attendees were tasked with identifying trail connections and destinations, inventorying the local highlights and existing bicycle routes and discussing known safety concerns for bicyclists and pedestrians. The group created a list of others who may be interested in participating and chatted about an appropriate name characterizing the trail.

The project is being funded by the Coastal Zone Management Program, Office of the Great Lakes, Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Meyerson explained the trail planning process will include public input through online surveys and public meetings later this year. If you are interested in participating in the committee and/or want more information about the project please contact Emily Meyerson, emeyerson14@gmail.com or 231-838-1539.