

## US 23 Heritage Route

Management Council Meeting Minutes

Wednesday December 9 at 1:00 pm

Location: Online



### **Present:**

Katie Wolf (Friends of the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary), Marlana MacNeill (Alcona County), Anne Belanger (Presque Isle County), Mary Ellen Jones (Alcona County), Larry Clark (South Bay Corridor), Kim Margherio (Rogers City), Scott Herceg (Cheboygan Chamber of Commerce), Mike Mahler (Target Alpena), Blake Gingrich (DNR), Eric Ostrander (DNR), Garrett Dawe (MDOT), Josh Grab (MDOT), Scott Thayer (MDOT), Pat Wyman (Mackinaw City), Chris Witulski (Besser Museum), Erin Kellstrom (Oscoda Area CVB), Andrea Kares (City of Alpena), Kyla Schatz (Alpena CVB), Belle Flora (Sunrise Coastal Coalition), Bev Bodem (Senator Stamas' office), Brandon Schroeder (Michigan Sea Grant), and Denise Cline (NEMCOG).

Katie Wolf called the meeting to order at 1:05 pm.

Agenda stands approved – no changes.

Minutes from September 5, 2019, stand approved – no changes.

### **Bylaws:**

The council discussed proposed changes to the bylaws and the fact that the additional members added from each municipality could result in a large number of additions. It was noted that, if that occurred, the council would look at amending that section. It was decided that, rather than keep one member from NRTH, it would be better to add two seats for "Friends" groups associated with state parks along the route.

*Motion by Scott Herceg, seconded by Belle Flora, to approve the bylaws with the proposed edits and the changes to the NRTH representative. Motion carried.*

### **Management Council Membership:**

With the changes in the bylaws, Denise Cline had a list of proposed people willing to serve on the council:

#### **Museum Representative:**

*Motion by Anne Belanger, seconded by Larry Clark, to appoint Chris Witulski (Besser Museum) to the US 23 Management Council to represent museums. Motion passed.*

#### **Cheboygan County:**

*Motion by Scott Herceg, seconded by Marlana MacNeill, to appoint Pat Wyman (Mackinaw City) and Jamie Westfall (Mackinaw Chamber of Commerce) to the US 23 Management Council to represent Mackinaw City and the Mackinaw Chamber. Motion passed.*

Presque Isle County:

*Motion by Anne Belanger, seconded by Chris Witulski, to appoint Kim Margherio to the US 23 Management Council to represent Rogers City. Motion passed.*

Alcona County:

*Motion by Mary Ellen Jones, seconded by Marlana MacNeill, to appoint Jacquelyn Schwanz to the US 23 Management Council to represent the City of Harrisville. Motion passed.*

Alpena County:

*Motion by Larry Clark, seconded by Scott Herceg, to appoint Andrea Kares to the US 23 Management Council to represent the City of Alpena. Motion passed.*

Iosco County:

*Motion by Belle Flora, seconded by Marlana MacNeill, to appoint Erin Kellstrom to the US 23 Management Council to represent the Oscoda Area CVB. Motion passed.*

**COVID-19:**

The group had a discussion about the effects of the pandemic on the region. Denise Cline had sent out a detailed report to the council. Mike Mahler provided an update on business grants available – information is located on the Alpena Chamber website. Revenue is down significantly at organizations such as CVBs. Alpena CVB is working part-time due to the decrease in revenue. The DNR reported that state parks received a large influx of visitors this past summer. MDOT reported that, while decreased travel resulted in decreased revenue, it has not had an impact on programs. Denise stated that NEMCOG is involved in the COVID relief efforts and that they are aggregating information on their website.

<http://www.discovernortheastmichigan.org/covid19.asp>

**NEMCOG Update:**

Website: Denise reviewed the website statistics – users were up over 31% and traffic is coming from Chicago this past year. Ocqueoc Falls continues to be the top attraction on the site.

Guidebook: Denise noted that she is sending out the draft guidebook for final review by the Management Council. Also – other print materials are available to send out.

FY 2020 Program Activities: Denise will be working on updates to the US 23 brochures (for Welcome Centers) and are adding new brochures to highlight the North Eastern State Trail, North Central State Trail and Iron Belle Trail (around Tawas Bay). She is working in conjunction with Emily Meyerson and the Top of Michigan Trails Council.

Trails: Denise noted that the Sunrise Coastal Trail Feasibility Study is complete and she will be sending around a link to access it. In addition, the Up North Trails website now encompasses all of the Upper Peninsula in addition to all of northern Michigan and includes all trails (federal,

state, and local). Lastly, she reminded the group that there are trail sign designs available for their use that were designed as part of the Up North Trails program.

Other Marketing Efforts: Scott Herceg summarized the grassroots collaborative marketing effort called “upNORTHeast.” Currently, the group consists of members from Cheboygan, Rogers City, Alpena and Harrisville who wish to use the brand to denote themselves as a regional destination (within the larger region). The brand would not replace local branding or the US 23 Heritage Route branding, but would work in conjunction with the regional program already in place. Anne Belanger noted it is important not to duplicate efforts and the group agreed. Mary Ellen Jones, Chris Witulski, and Katie Wolf discussed the efforts of the ARTown program and how it functioned within the US 23 program as well. Katie Wolf suggested a separate committee meeting to discuss this issue further.

### Updates:

US 23 South Bay Corridor: Larry Clark discussed Partridge Point Park (and the proposed sign on US 23), the Alpena Mall purchase, the Alpena Bike Path extension, and highway clean-up.

Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary: Katie Wolf updated the group on online programming, the Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Trail (115 signs from Tawas to north of Hammond Bay), the North Point project, and the Thunder Bay riverfront project.

Sunrise Coastal Coalition: Belle Flora will talk to Scott Herceg about the upNORTHeast project.

MDOT: Garrett Dawe noted two road projects on US 23 (north of Harrisville from Washington to Lakeshore and east of Cheboygan from Duncan Avenue to Cordwood Road). Josh Grab introduced himself – Josh has replaced Tom Doyle and oversees the Pure Michigan Byway program for the state. Josh noted that NEMCOG received \$7,500 of additional money from MDOT this year for materials. Also, the MDOT Byway website is likely sending hits to the US 23 website. He will send Denise Cline materials on the National Scenic Byway program so that US 23 can decide whether or not to apply when the program opens up again. Also – he noted that, in the MDOT Driving Guide, US 23 is called “Sunrise Coast.” Anne Belanger discussed forming an ad-hoc committee to discuss the official name/brand of the route.

DNR: The parks were filled with visitors this summer. They are now looking forward to event planning, but the events will not be as frequent or as large.

Tourism Reps: Kyla Schatz discussed the part-time status of their staff, but noted that they sent out many visitor guides this summer. Also, there were travel writers in the area this past summer as well as Under the Radar at Knaebe’s. Scott Herceg echoed the difficulties in operating when room revenues are down.

Saginaw Chippewa Tribe: Denise Cline noted that Don Seal had called her to let her know he might not be able to call into the meeting but to let him know if there are needs in the program.

Counties:

Alcona: Mary Ellen Jones noted that Farm to Fork Small Farm Conference was cancelled for 2021, but that they are planning for 2022 to have Sean Sherman as keynote speaker, who is renowned for pre-colonial indigenous food. Mary Ellen also updated the group on Inspiration Alcona writers conference and arts retreat as well as the purchase of a parcel of land by the Alcona County Commission on Aging for a community center.

Anne Belanger reminded the group that it is a good time to request print materials to be ready for next summer. Denise will send out materials to those who request them.

Meeting adjourned at 3:15 pm.  
Submitted by Denise Cline