

US 23 Heritage Route

Management Council Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, September 20 at 1 pm

Location: Thunder Bay Maritime Heritage Center (and virtual)



Present:

1. Marlena MacNeill (Alcona Township Supervisor)
2. Anne Belanger (Presque Isle County)
3. Jeff Gray (Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary)
4. Don Gilmet (Alpena County Commissioner)
5. Nathan Skibbe (Alpena Township Supervisor)
6. Mary Ellen Jones (Alcona County)
7. Blake Gingrich (DNR)
8. Eric Ostrander (DNR)
9. Heidi Phaneuf (MDOT – North Region)
10. Kevin Schaedig (MDOT – Alpena TSC)
11. Pat Wyman (Mackinaw City Village Manager)
12. Amy Millard (Mackinaw City Chamber Director)
13. Erin Kellstrom (Oscoda Area CVB)
14. Mary Beth Stutzman (Alpena CVB Director)
15. Adam Poll (Alpena Chamber Director)
16. Montiel Birmingham (City of Alpena Planner)
17. Rachel Smolinski (City of Alpena Manager)
18. Belle Flora (Sunrise Coastal Coalition/Oscoda CVB)
19. Beverly Bodem (Senator Stamas' office)
20. Larry Clark (South Bay Corridor)
21. Doug Baum (NEMCOG)
22. Denise Cline (NEMCOG)

Call to Order: Marlena MacNeill called the meeting to order at 1:05 pm. Each member introduced themselves. It was noted that Katie Wolf is no longer with the Friends of the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary, so Marlena is the acting Chair.

Agenda: No additions to the agenda.

Minutes: Motion by Don Gilmet, seconded by Anne Belanger, to approve the minutes with the correction of the word "advertising" on page 2. Motion approved.

Management Council Membership:

The following members are being added to the Council:

Museum/Historic – Brenda Matt (Standish Depot)

Motion by Nathan Skibbe, seconded by Adam Poll, to add Brenda Matt to the Council. Motion approved.

The following officers were elected:

Motion by Marlena MacNeill, seconded by Adam Poll, to nominate Anne Belanger as Chair of the US 23 Management Council. Motion approved.

Motion by Adam Poll, seconded by Don Gilmet, to nominate Erin Kellstrom as Vice-Chair of the US 23 Management Council. Motion approved.

The group discussed if there are any other communities which should have membership. Denise Cline indicated that Presque Isle Township should have representatives and Don Gilmet indicated that he could represent Presque Isle Township since he is moving there.

NEMCOG Update:

Website: Denise Cline reviewed the website statistics – the top cities sending website users have changed this year to be Detroit, New York and Ann Arbor. She noted the changes in referring sites as well. Users from other states are up – New York is now the #2 ranked state sending users (after Michigan). Jeff Gray noted that the article in the New York Times regarding the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary could be a contributing factor to that.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/29/travel/thunder-bay-national-marine-sanctuary.html#:~:text=The%20Thunder%20Bay%20National%20Marine,parks%2C%20but%20below%20the%20surface>

Ocqueoc Falls continues to be the top attraction on the site during the last year and for all time. Ocqueoc receives more hits than the US 23 main page. The top region receiving hits is Oscoda/AuSable/Tawas and the top interest area is Outdoor Adventures.

Print Materials: NEMCOG staff continues to receive requests for print materials. Denise acknowledged Theresa Huff (NEMCOG) for all of the great work she does responding to requests throughout the year. All requests come through the website, so visitors are finding us online, but they still want physical copies of materials to travel with. The guidebook is the most popular item and the current copies are out of stock. Denise updated the guidebook with new photos and some new information and it is being reprinted this month. Denise reminded the group that two new brochures are also available – the North Eastern State Trail and the North Central State Trail. The county-level brochures will continue to be updated and supplied to the Welcome Centers. She also provides other materials (guidebook, birding map, etc) to those Welcome Centers that specifically request those.

Other Tourism Programs: Denise Cline updated the Council on other tourism programs that have been created by NEMCOG. The most recent is an 11-county tourism/talent attraction website. NEMCOG contracted with Audra Leininger to create this site. The website is <https://www.northeastmichigan.org/>. The website is an amazing resource and she encouraged

everyone to visit it. In addition, she reminded the group of the Up North Trails website (<http://www.upnorthtrails.org/>). Up North Trails presents trail information and maps for nonmotorized and motorized trails at the local, state and federal level. The site includes all of northern Michigan including the entire Upper Peninsula and the Genesee County region (Flint area). In addition, sign designs are available to any community that would like to use them. NEMCOG also now has the ability to create the maps for the kiosks in-house at a lower expense. The sign construction drawings are available here: <http://www.discovernortheastmichigan.org/trails.asp>.

Byway Program: The Council had a general discussion about activities and directions the program could go in the future. Anne Belanger brought up using social media to target interest groups.

Doug Baum discussed the idea of selling advertising on the US 23 website (in addition to the other tourism websites that NEMCOG manages). A detailed discussion was had on this topic. Revenue generation is needed in order to assist NEMCOG with managing the program. Currently, all funding comes from the MDOT Work Program which is primarily for assistance provided by the NEMCOG Transportation Planner on road issues. Brochure design and printing are funded by MDOT, but the administration of the program should have its own funding source. The Council would like to see the advertising or sponsorships done in a way which doesn't detract from the site (such as only allowing that on interior pages). The idea of selling ads on print materials was brought up. MDOT is going to check into this issue. The NEMCOG Board is going to discuss the issue as well. A sub-committee was formed to discuss this issue regarding US 23 including representatives from several counties along the route: Anne Belanger (Presque Isle County), Erin Kellstrom/Belle Flora (Iosco County), Amy Millard/Pat Wyman (Cheboygan County), Montiel Birmingham (Alpena), and Doug Baum/Denise Cline (NEMCOG).

Denise Cline asked Kevin Schaedig several questions regarding signs:

1. Where are the Pure Michigan Byway signs located currently?
2. Is it possible to request more and, if so, how much would that cost?
3. How much would it cost to print US 23 logo signs to place on the same sign structure as the Byway signs (pursuant to the Heritage Route signage guidelines)?

Denise Cline indicated that she is interested in holding a statewide Byway conference as was done in the past. NEMCOG could assist with organizing that. It is always beneficial to know what other Byways are doing and to let them know what US 23 is doing.

Updates:

Michigan Sea Grant/GLSI: Denise Cline gave an update for Brandon Schroeder including NEMIGLSI (youth are hitting coastline), MAEOE (Michigan Alliance for Environmental and Outdoor Education) education network to host a conference in Alpena in 2023. Great Lakes Fisheries Heritage Trail – working with Besser Museum – how should we collaborate/benefit from this network in connection with US 23?

Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary: Jeff Gray spoke about the cruise ships that are visiting Alpena.

Sunrise Coastal Coalition/Oscoda Area: Belle Flora and Erin Kellstrom spoke about the marketing activities that are ongoing in the Oscoda area.

Rogers City/Presque Isle County: Anne Belanger spoke about the Rogers City Main Street designation and Redevelopment Ready Communities certification.

MDOT: Heidi Phaneuf spoke about the Northern Michigan Non-Motorized Plan Update which NEMCOG is planning to work on. In addition, the working group is planning to start meeting again. Kevin Schaedig spoke about upcoming road improvements on US 23.

DNR: Blake Gingrich spoke about the numbers of visitors at the state parks this year and the improvements planned for them. Eric Ostrander spoke about winter cabin rentals at Harrisville State Park and the Negwegon backcountry camping which will be going to a reservation system.

Mackinaw City: Amy Millard spoke about the recent tourism season in Mackinaw and also the cross-town trail project.

Alpena: Mary Beth Stutzman spoke about the fall campaign, marketing for small meetings, and journalists from around the US that are writing about Alpena. Don Gilmet spoke about the airport, Long Lake Park upgrades, and the campsites at the County Fairgrounds.

Alcona: Marlena MacNeill spoke about the numbers being down on the Black River Bridge Walk this year and also the dredging of the mouth of the river which is needed. Mary Ellen Jones spoke about events that happened this year in the Harrisville area.

US 23 South Bay Corridor: Larry Clark gave acknowledgement to law enforcement for assisting with Partridge Point Park, noted that the south bay clean-up lacked volunteers, and that a public input session on the extension of the Bi-Path was being held that evening. The Council briefly discussed the Sunrise Coastal Trail Plan which is another project that needs to be implemented.

<http://www.discovernortheastmichigan.org/docview.asp?did=686>

Senator Stamas' Office: Beverly Bodem spoke about the Thunder Bay River Center 1st phase (2023).

The Council discussed the best time of the year to meet. September does work for most. In addition, a spring meeting will be added in March or April (but avoiding spring break). Denise will also resend the instructions for updating the website.

Meeting adjourned at 3:00 pm.

Submitted by Denise Cline