

Root River Trail Extension - Citizens Exploratory Committee
Meeting minutes.

Date: April 16th, 2025
Location: Houston Nature Center, Houston, MN

1. Call To Order, Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 3:32 p.m. by Larry Kirch, City of La Crescent, Community Development Director.

Members Present: Dick Wieser – La Crescent, Larry Stryker – La Crescent, Jake Olson – Hokah, Jay Wheaton - Houston

Members Absent: Kevin Walther – Hokah, Margaret Knutson, Houston, Ben Horn – Houston County, Jason Kraft – Houston County (excused)

Others Present: Allison Wagner, EDA/Houston County, Hein Bloom, Scott Wallace, Gary Wilson, Derek Wallace, Alexa Shapiro

2. March 12th, 2024 Minutes - Acceptance

Larry Kirch asked if there were any changes or corrections to the minutes. There were no changes or corrections and the minutes were accepted by consensus.

3. Discussion Items -

- a. Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail, a non-profit effort to establish a 100+ mile backpacking trail with updates on current progress – Alexa Shapiro

Alexa Shapiro provided a handout to those in attendance that described the vision, process, funding from the DNR LCCMR funds, connections with local government. Alexa provided a detailed overview of the initiative, the progress to date, the public meetings and listening sessions they have been having, the origins of the idea, parallels to other “national” hiking trails like the Ice Age Trail and the Superior Hiking Trail. The group is a 501 c3 and received funding from the DNR through the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, and also received technical assistance from the U of M’s Regional Sustainable Development Partnership Empowering Small Minnesota Communities grant. Meetings have been positive and several private landowners have signed letters of intent or agreements to have the trail go through their property. The trail attempts to use land that is already public land with little to none on the Root River Trail itself. The group is working with trail towns and is willing to come and speak to any local government council. There is no condemnation of land and the use of the land will generally be by easements from private landowners. The organization has a website and social media if anyone wants to keep track of the project. The committee members had a few

questions that Alexa answered. The committee thanked Alexa for coming to present the Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail to the group.

b. Grants and Grant Writing Activities:

- i. City of La Crescent – MnDOT IJJA Transportation Technical Assistance Grant – Wagon Wheel Bridge to Miller’s Corners – Status – The city engineer says he will have draft cross-sections to the city in May. The city’s Federal Railroad Administration Crossing Elimination Grant is now back on again. This will give the city the opportunity to work with the CPCK railroad on this project and open discussion on use of RR ROW for a trail.
 - ii. City of La Crescent – MnDOT Transportation Alternatives Grant from Wagon Wheel Trail to S. 14th Street – District 6 ATP Results – Modified to west side of STH 16 – The MnDOT District Areawide Transportation Partnership committee met and awarded \$1,575,000 to the city for 2029. The grant will pay for a 10’ trail on the west side of STH 16 from the traffic signal to S. 14th Street as well as a grant on the west side of S. Chestnut Street from the base of the Wagon Wheel Trail Bridge south to connect to the DOT path that goes up to Highway 16 (which will be widened to 10’ wide in 2027).
 - iii. Fed Grant – RAISE – Now BUILD Planning, Environmental and Engineering Design - Larry applied for the Federal RAISE grant, now changed back the BUILD grant. That grant application was more extensive and if funded, would complete the public and agency stakeholder process, the environmental review and 100 percent construction plans. We find out about that grant in June. The grant had no match requirement and the city requested a little over \$3 Million dollars. The BUILD grant was cut by \$1.35 Billion in the new administration so funding is not very likely.
 - iv. Mn LCCMR Grant – Planning, Environmental and Engineering Design - Larry Kirch submitted a DNR LCCMR grant which uses the state lottery dollars. That grant will generally cover the same scope of activities as the ATTIP and BUILD grant but, after conversing with MnDNR officials will cover 15% engineering plans (pre-design activities) and not 100% engineering plans. These grants require a 25% match. The grants are under review and we will find out later this summer. There is a meeting on April 28th that LCCMR board holds to discuss how they are going to review the projects.
 - v. Congressionally Designated Spending – Application – P, E and ED - Larry Kirch applied for funds through the Congressionally Designated Spending program through our Senator Klobuchar. He sent a copy to Congressman Finstad as his deadline was back in March. Senator Klobuchar extended the deadline after Larry submitted and he did not submit to Senator Smith but he did inform the Senator’s staff. The project activities ask for 100 percent engineering design, environmental review and outreach to the public and agencies.
- c. Draft Joint Powers Agreement – Status – Larry Kirch relayed that the City Attorney is to have a draft by May 7th.

- d. Update on MnDNR – Funding Source used for Sather Property – Larry still has not heard anything about this from the Minnesota DNR
- e. Review Survey Parcels Legals Info – Research on NRCS easements – Larry went to the county courthouse today and obtained copies of the easements and will review prior to the next meeting.
- f. Other- MnDOT Active Transportation Planning Project to update La Crescent Bike-Ped Plan – The city applied for and received approval for MnDOT to hire a consultant to update the city’s bicycle and pedestrian plan and also include a Safe Routes to School Component.

4. Public Comment – None

5. Next Meeting – April 16th – Houston. The committee discussed cancelling the June meeting.

6. Adjourn – the meeting was adjourned at 4:23 p.m.

Meeting minutes drafted by Larry Kirch, City of La Crescent, Community Development Director

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