

Root River Trail Extension - Citizens Exploratory Committee

Meeting minutes.

Date: January 11, 2023

Location: La Crescent City Hall

1. Call To Order, Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 3:05 p.m. by Larry Kirch, City of La Crescent, Community Development Director.

Members Present: Hein Bloem, Ben Horn, Jake Olson, Larry Stryker, Joe Thesing, Kevin Walther, Jay Wheaton, Dick Wieser

Members Absent: none

Others Present: Allison Wagner, Houston County Economic Development Director/Board Clerk, Christina Peterson, La Crescent Resident

Larry Stryker suggested the group go around the table and introduce themselves and what communities they represent. Larry Stryker, City of La Crescent, Ben Horn, Houston County, Jake Olson, City of Hokah, Hein Bloem, City of Houston, Jay Wheaton, City of Houston, Kevin Walther, City of Hokah, Joe Thesing, Houston County, Dick Weiser, City of La Crescent

2. November 11, 2022 Minutes - Acceptance

Larry Kirch asked if there were any changes or corrections to the minutes, there were none and the minutes were accepted by consensus.

3. Update on MnDOT Active Transportation Program Corridor Plan – Wagon Wheel Bridge to Miller’s Corner (STH 16)

Larry Kirch updated the committee on the MnDOT Active Transportation Planning (STH 16 corridor from the new Wagon Wheel bridge landing to Miller’s Corner) corridor study. The project consultants and DOT launched a survey and website. The survey resulted in 279 respondents. The mapping piece of the website did not illicit much as only two people tried to use the mapping feature. There is a local “planning committee” made up of the consultant team, MnDOT staff, DNR, USF&W staff, city staff, LAPC staff, bike and pedestrian advocates. The “planning committee” will meet again on March 2 in a virtual meeting. A third planning committee meeting as well as a public meeting and city council meetings are also to be scheduled in March and April. The project was to finish in March but is more likely to be April. Three alternatives were identified all with constraints. At a consultant call, the MnDOT staff is attempting to obtain more detailed right-of-way maps of the corridor to better understand where MnDOT ROW exists. As noted, the corridor planning study is related to this effort but is proceeding independently of the work of this

committee. Larry Kirch mentioned that there are several other projects in the downtown related to the corridor study including a planning study of Walnut Street from South 3rd Street north to the new hotel as well as some projects related to the Wagon Wheel Bridge Landing area currently known as Overlook Plaza.

4. Guest Speaker – Christina Peterson

Christina Peterson introduced herself and described her previous involvement in this effort both as an employee of an engineering firm and as the Houston City Clerk/Administrator. Christina was involved around 2005 and spend a lot of time researching property owners and working with the county committee that was initiated through the Houston County EDA. That effort lasted approximately 10 years and work ceased due to objection from several land owners, and the previous use of eminent domain for other parts of Root River Trail which put a few owners on the defense. There are now several Minnesota DNR designated lands and the DNR has at least four divisions related to their functions. Agencies include the MnDNR, the MnDOT, the NRCS and USF&W.

Some strategies that Christina identified was to have a dual track, one for agencies and one for private landowners. We should review public ownership and then meet with all the agencies at once and include the internal divisions within the DNR. We should check the current ownership and review any easements that were created on both private and public property. Larry mentioned the possible role of an organization like the Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota that could be the entity to acquire the property for eventual ownership by a public entity.

5. Discussion Items –

- a. Review Draft of Stakeholders/Resources (Communities, Groups, State/Federal agencies, maps, aerial photos, ownership information, existing plans)

Some additional names mentioned as resources were Craig Blummer former DNR staff person, Dale Scoby who has done title research before, perhaps hire a title company. Larry Kirch said he would reach out to the new MnDNR trails person and also reach out to the Parks and Trails Council. Summer Thorson's name was also mentioned.

- b. Review Draft RRT Extension Fact Sheet

Larry Kirch handed out a very preliminary draft of an Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) list of questions and promised to work on this much more before the next meeting.

- c. Review Draft Task List/Milestones/Deliverables (aka Work Breakdown Structure)

Larry Kirch handed out a sample of a Work Breakdown Structure and said that he would further develop the list of tasks. Some of these tasks included:

- 1) Reaching out to the new MnDNR parks and trails person, Tiffany Howard

- 2) Reaching out to the Parks and Trails Council
- 3) Creating some mapping of the corridor for both public and private ownership
- 4) Conducting title work on the properties
- 5) Meeting with Agencies
- 6) Finding funding sources
- 7) Creating a project website/fact sheet
- 8) Developing the “Trails Plan”

There was consensus that there was a lot of basic background work needing to be done before any private property owners were contacted. Perhaps a lot of the ownership has changed and it was felt that a better understanding how much of the study area had now moved into public ownership over the last decade was essential. The public is invited to these meetings but it was premature to hold any public outreach meetings or contact individuals.

6. 2023 Meeting Dates/Times

The next meeting of the Root River Trail Extension - Citizens Exploratory Committee will be held on Wednesday, March 8, 2023 at 3:00 p.m., in Houston, Mn Tentative location at the Nature Center. Future meetings are April 5, May 10 (likely virtual), June 7, July 12, August 9, September 13, October 4, November 8.

7. Public Comment - None

8. Adjourn – The meeting was adjourned at 4:25 p.m.

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