

Root River Trail Extension - Citizens Exploratory Committee

Meeting minutes.

Date: November 16, 2022

Location: Hokah Fire Station - 9 Mill Street

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: Jay Wheaton, Dick Wieser, Larry Stryker, Joe Thesing, Ben Horn, Kevin Walther

Members Absent: Hein Bloem, Jake Olson

Others Present: Allison Wagner, Houston County Economic Development Director/Board Clerk, Sam Jandt, Houston County Attorney

For purposes of introductions, each member introduced themselves and stated which community they represented: Jay Wheaton, City of Houston, Dick Weiser, City of La Crescent, Larry Stryker, City of La Crescent, Joe Thesing, Houston County, Ben Horn, Houston County, Kevin Walther, City of Hokah. Hein Bloem, represents the City of Houston, Jake Olson, represents the City of Hokah.

2. Review MOA to Jointly Cooperate

Larry Kirch walked through the MOA to Jointly Cooperate, which was sent to each of the members, section by section. County Attorney, Sam Jandt also assisted in clarifying some of the provisions. The MOA to Jointly Cooperate was approved and signed by all three cities and the county.

3. DRAFT Project Charter

Larry Kirch had drafted a “Project Charter” for the committee to spell out the commitment of the parties to the MOU, projects roles and responsibilities of the committee as well as city and county council/board members and staff. The Project Charter lays out the expectations of both staff and the committee and essentially provides authorization for the project manager(s) to work on behalf of the county, cities, and the committee.

4. Name this Citizens Committee (what should we call this committee?)

Several potential names of the committee were discussed. The committee settled on the “Root River Trail Extension - Citizens Exploratory Committee.” This name resonated with the committee as it included the name of the trail, that it is citizen-led and the role of the

committee is exploratory in nature, in that any recommendations for a trail plan must be approved by the County and all three cities.

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

Larry Kirch gave an overview of the Corridor Planning study that is being funded by the Minnesota DOT. The city did not receive a grant, but a project with a consultant funded by the MnDOT. The focus of the study is the corridor for bicyclists and pedestrians between the new Wagon Wheel Bridge and the intersection of Mn STHs 16 and 26 (Miller’s Corner). The most recent activity was a day-long series of meetings and walking and bicycling the corridor with a “planning team,” an evening public workshop for citizens to provide input on the corridor planning and a meeting of state, city and federal staff to talk about the project and data needs. The next steps are a community survey, a project flyer/mailer and MnDOT Website. People will be directed to take a survey in December via a MnDOT project website.

6. Identify Stakeholders (Communities, Groups, State/Federal agencies)

In a roundtable discussion, the following stakeholders were identified: Townships, SMART, Minnesota Parks and Trails Council, Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota, Harmony Trails Commission (Gabby Kinneberg, President – Preston), Root River Trail Towns, Bluff Country Scenic Byway, MnDNR, MnDOT, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Rails to Trails Conservancy, CP Rail, snowmobile clubs, landowners, Houston County residents, County Highway, County Engineer, La Crescent Chamber, Houston Chamber.

7. Identify Resources (individuals/agencies)

In a roundtable discussion, the following resource people were identified: Christina Peterson, Tiffany Howard, new MnDNR trails person, MnDOT Kurt Wayne, Eric Schmitt, County Surveyor, CP Rail, Gabby Kinneberg from Harmony Trails Commission.

8. Identify Resources (maps, aerial photos, ownership information, existing plans)

In a roundtable discussion, the following resources were identified:

- 2011 MnDNR Trail Plan, MnDOT Right-of-Way maps TH 16 and TH 26
- Houston County Right-of-Way maps for CTH 21
- GIS -Ownership Maps – Spreadsheet
- MnDOT Studies
- On X App (Hunting Map App)

9. What does the “Trail Plan” look like?

In a roundtable discussion, the following draft headings of the contents of the Trail Plan were outlined:

- 1) History/Background of Trail
- 2) Previous Trail Planning Efforts
- 3) Exploratory Committee Origin/Purpose/Function
- 4) Public Outreach Plan
- 5) Description of Alternative Routes
- 6) Evaluation of Alternative Routes
- 7) Recommended Trail Route
- 8) Recommended Strategy for Acquiring Property

As part of the discussion of ways to acquire property, the following general real estate transfer methods were briefly mentioned. The project is a very long way out from acquiring any property and it was noted that the Trail Plan had to be approved by the County and the three cities before the project moves along. There is no funding for acquiring any property and one of the Trail Plan's content items is the identification of possible funding sources for the acquisition and construction of the trail.

Ways to buy, obtain an “interest” and transfer property:

- 1) Right of First Refusal,
 - 2) Offer to Purchase
 - 3) Purchase Agreement
 - 4) Easement Agreement
- The actual transfer of the fee title to a property is typically done via a Warranty Deed or Quit Claim Deed. Some land is purchased/sold on a “Land Contract or Contract for Deed” where the transaction is completed once the final payment is made/

10. Begin to formulate Task List/Milestones/Deliverables

In a roundtable discussion the following tasks were identified as next steps:

- 1) Prepare ownership maps/exhibits
- 2) Create Info/Fact Sheet on the RRTE-CEC
- 3) Invite Christina Peterson to next meeting

11. Discussion Items –

- a. Chair and Vice Chair? – The committee decided not to have a committee chair and work from consensus based decision making.
- b. Create Bylaws ? (need Councils/County Board approval) – The committee decided not to have Bylaws at this time.

12. Set Next/Regular Meeting Dates/Times

The next meeting of the Root River Trail Extension - Citizens Exploratory Committee will be held on Wednesday, January 11, 2023 at 3:00 p.m., Location TBD.

13. Public Comment - None

14. Adjourn – The meeting was adjourned at 4:50 p.m.

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