



## Local News

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### Hilltop sidewalk - glimmer of hope

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ST. JOSEPH - The sidewalk project along Hilltop Road from Washington Avenue to Red Arrow Highway is not dead - yet.

St. Joseph Township Trustee Ron Griffin said during the board's workshop Monday that if he gets all the necessary easements by Dec. 20, the project can begin in the spring of 2011. By Dec. 20 he needs to let other municipalities know if he is able to trade dates with them or not.

Still holding up the project is Fleming Brothers Oil of South Haven, which owns Marathon Oil at the corner of Cleveland Avenue and Hilltop Road. Griffin said he has easements and verbal agreements from all the other properties.

Township officials thought the sidewalk project had died in September when the necessary easements were not obtained in time from three businesses. Two have now agreed to easements, but Fleming is the sole objector, and it only takes one to kill the project.

Griffin said he has been working with other municipalities to trade dates with them so the township could move forward in the spring as previously planned.

The joint project between St. Joseph Township and the city of St. Joseph stands to receive \$358,400 from the federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality program to help pay for the sidewalk.

If all the easements are obtained in time, the sidewalk will be built at no cost to the property owners. It will be on the north side of Hilltop Road from Lakeshore Drive to Cleveland Avenue and on the south side of the road from Cleveland to Washington avenues. It is estimated that the sidewalk will allow 2,500 employees to walk to nearby businesses and restaurants.

At the noon workshop, Griffin also presented a St. Joseph Township Trails plan that includes 49 projects to enhance nonmotorized travel throughout the township.

Among the items is adding a sidewalk along Red Arrow Highway from Maiden Lane to Hilltop Road. Griffin said this is part of a Michigan Department of Transportation project creating a nonmotorized pathway from New Buffalo to Sault Ste Marie.

He said the township will now figure out how much money each project costs and prioritize each one.

Also at the noon workshop were representatives from the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission to talk about the Walk and Roll subcommittee of the Twin Cities Area Transportation Study, which was formed to study the priorities for pedestrians and bicycle paths in the Benton Harbor and St. Joseph area.

Residents can go to the commission's Website to download a questionnaire about the study at

<http://www.swmpc.org/walkrollpoll.asp>.

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