

Phase two planning for cross-state trail kicks off

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By Kelsey Hammon Email the author Published 8:36 am Monday, March 20, 2017

Developers working to complete the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail met Friday morning at the Niles Township Hall to kick off phase two planning of the 1.2 mile trail, which will join Michigan with Indiana and Niles with Niles Township.

Despite having to work around the roosting habits of the northern long-eared and Indiana bats, which delayed summer tree removal, officials are making progress on deadlines.

Joining the discussion Friday were Suzannah Deneau, the project engineer from Wightman & Associates; grant writer Marcy Hamilton, a senior planner with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission; members of the park commission, Sarah Craig and Jill DeLucia; and Niles Township Supervisor Jim Stover.

Some of the newest updates included designating prospective locations for three trailheads. The trailheads will include a small covered seating area, map of the trail and a barcode that can be scanned with a smart phone that will take people to a website about the trail.

One trailhead is proposed to be located near the entrance of the trail, north of U.S. 12. The second trailhead will be across from the Modineer plant on Third Street. The third trailhead is planned to be located at Fort and Third streets. Prototypes for the bridge that will cross Brandywine Creek were also evaluated.

Deneau said the 55-foot bridge will be constructed of weathering steel. She approximated that the material could last around 75 years before warranting replacement.

Other trail features will include a Third Street crossing, with audible cross walking indications and flashing yellow lights. The trail could also include mile markers.

The official type size and location of the bridge must be completed and submitted to be in compliance with MDOT's deadlines by April 10.

Trail goers will also be able to utilize a fishing platform/overlook. A location decision for the platform was not decided on Friday.

A picnic location with tables and benches is planned to be set up off of Third Street across from Modineer.

The 10-foot wide multi-use trail will be compliant with the American Disabilities Act to allow easy access for people with all abilities.

Besides these amenities, Deneau said those traversing the path will have the privilege of taking in a lot of beautiful nature.

Deneau helped to flag the route of the trail. The pink markers could be spotted dripping with the freezing rain that plagued the area Friday. Among the trees, Deneau said she hoped residents could enjoy the nature.

"It is just really beautiful," Deneau said. "It almost feels secluded when you are out in the middle of the area. You can't hear the trucks [from U.S. 12]."

Surveyors also found rabbits, deer and even the tracks of coyotes.

The grant funds were also reviewed. The project is expecting to receive MDOT funds for approximately \$500,299, which can be applied to all costs except for engineering. The Department of Natural Resources Trust Fund is expected to contribute approximately \$300,000. The township is still awaiting to sign the agreement with the DNR. Hamilton said she expects they will get the paperwork at the end of March or early April.

Hamilton said they have been cleared to begin engineering work, even though the agreement has not been signed yet.

"We can do that work without having a signed contract from the DNR," Hamilton said. "They are OK with that, so that is why we are moving ahead, because we need to meet some deadlines."

The committed local match from the Niles Township is expected to be about \$135,000, though several organizations and foundations are expected to donate.

MDOT's "conditional commitments" for the grant must be completed before the end of their fiscal year on Sept. 30, 2017. Several of these conditions have already been fulfilled, which included evaluating the area for threatened and

endangered species and for any potential archeological artifacts.

“We did find things where we needed to adjust our trail route,” Deneau said.

The trail route was moved about 100 feet to the east when three different historical artifacts were discovered by Great Lakes Research, who conducted the survey last summer.

Construction is slated to begin in December 2017 through November 2018.

To learn more, people may visit swmpc.org/inmitrail.asp