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TOP STORY

Berrien gets behind Marquette trail project

Local section would run from Indiana line to New Buffalo

By JOHN MATUSZAK - HP Staff Writer Mar 10, 2019

ST. JOSEPH — Berrien County officials are offering their support for extending a biking and hiking trail that starts in Chicago, from the Indiana state line to New Buffalo, but they won't have to break a sweat doing it.

County commissioners this week will vote to request a \$1.5 million Transportation Alternative Program grant to add a 3.8-mile section of the Marquette Greenway Trail, and it won't cost them any money. The county will manage the funds, but the \$1 million local match will come from the city of New Buffalo, New Buffalo Township, the Pokagon Fund, Berrien Community Foundation, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and Friends of Harbor Country.

The total cost of the project is \$2.5 million.

Marcy Hamilton, with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, spoke with county commissioners to update them on the project conceived with Harbor Country Trails, and to solicit their support.

The trail starts in Chicago's Calumet Park, running along the lakeshore and through the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, and would cover 58 miles when extended to New Buffalo.

Having non-motorized trails helps retain families, businesses and young professionals, Hamilton said, along with promoting tourism, increasing tax revenue and encouraging physical activity. Studies show that having a more walkable community increases home values.

Surveys show that people want more park areas and walking and jogging trails, Hamilton illustrated.

Initial plans called for having the trail between the Amtrak line and the lake, Hamilton said, but they ran into difficulties obtaining the right of way from homeowners' associations.

The plan now is to have the trail located between the railroad tracks and U.S. 12, Hamilton explained.

About a half-mile of the trail would run through the village of Grand Beach. Hamilton said that village officials are undecided at this time about granting the right of way.

Commissioner Jim Curran, a retired Michigan State Police officer, urged that barriers be built between vehicles and pedestrians. He noted that when Indiana added bike lanes along its highways, fatalities increased.

The Marquette Greenway project started in 2005, and 28 miles had been completed or had guaranteed funding by last year. The Berrien County section, if funded, is expected to be completed in 2020.

Last summer the Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission applied for a \$23 million federal grant to finish the remaining 30 miles of trail. The total cost of the Greenway is \$34 million.

The Berrien County Parks Department has plans on the drawing board for a linear park and trail along Red Arrow Highway, from Bridgman to New Buffalo Township, that could be a further extension of the trail.

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