

## Bridge of dreams

By DEBRA HAIGHT - HP Correspondent | Posted: Sunday, September 18, 2016 6:00 am

BERRIEN CENTER — Crafting park plans are routine matters for local government, bureaucratic rope-jumping required for state parks and recreation grants.

Governments think small and think big when they submit such wish lists.

And Berrien Township officials are offering a very big wish: Rebuilding the bridge over Lake Chapin.

Most of the concrete piers are already there, remnants of a long-abandoned interurban rail line. The township's vision is to create a pedestrian-bicycle bridge span.

"I would love to do something like this," township Parks Board member Mark Coulston said, recalling the pedestrian bridge over the St. Joseph River he remembers from his youth in Niles. "It would be a beautiful thing to have across Lake Chapin."

But he concedes the township has two chances for such a bridge: slim and none.

"If (Facebook founder) Mark Zuckerberg wanted to fund it, it could be done," Coulston said. "If I win the lottery, there will be a bridge across Lake Chapin."

He said he knows the state and township have other funding priorities.

A revived bridge would become part of the long-term drive to develop and connect nonmotorized trails across the state. There are several such trails in Berrien County. Berrien Township's plan notes the bridge would connect proposed trails on either side of the river.

The plan includes some of the more routine wishes, such as playground equipment.

Township Clerk Mary Jane Dean said the plan is for the next five years and represents more than a year of work by the township Parks Committee. The effort included a June 2015 pancake breakfast at Range Line Park.

Committee members included Township Supervisor Bryan Bixby, Township Trustee Julie Burke and residents Tracy Bauer, Jeff Pisarky and Coulston. They were aided by the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission.



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HP file photo These concrete piers in Lake Chapin long ago held a railroad bridge. Berrien Township officials would like to see a bicycle-pedestrian bridge built on the piers.

Dean said this is the township's first parks and recreation plan in nearly a decade. The township approved its last plan in 2002 for the years 2003-07. Such plans are demanded by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources in order to receive agency parks and recreation grants.

She said the township's primary objective is to seek grants to replace playground equipment at the Township Hall and develop more trails in and around Range Line Park.

Dean said larger projects, like re-establishing the interurban bridge, would be nice but would require a lot of money.

The plan's goals call for maintaining existing facilities, coordinating recreational opportunities with Oronoko Township and Berrien Springs, improving portages and access to the St. Joseph River and enhancing the Love Creek area.

The action plan lists 12 items for Range Line Park, including adding disc golf and a dog park, eight items for Fisherman's Haven, including building a path to the Policemen's Memorial Park, five items for the park at the Township Hall, including updating playground equipment, and three items for enhancing the Love Creek area.

Berrien Township hosts three township parks and Love Creek County Park. There are also private offerings like Five Pines and Michiana Christian Service Camp.

Berrien Township will have a public hearing at 7 p.m. Tuesday to get comments on its recreation plan. The meeting will be at the Township Hall along M-140.

The proposed plan can be viewed at <http://www.swmpc.org/berriertownship.asp>.