



News

New Buffalo sidewalk project a team effort

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Print Page

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NEW BUFFALO — Walking and biking to school will be safer for New Buffalo students thanks to a \$585,000 reimbursement grant awarded by the Michigan Department of Transportation's Safe Routes to Schools program.

The grant, announced by New Buffalo Area Schools Superintendent Mark Westerburg during the Monday, July 14, Board of Education meeting, will fund approximately 3.5 miles of new sidewalks within city limits to connect local schools with nearby neighborhoods. All walks will be ADA compliant with appropriate crossings, signs and ramps.

The next step will be applying to The Pokagon Fund for a grant to fund the engineering costs, with construction expected to begin in 2015 or 2016. The Fund already granted \$17,000 to the Friends of Harbor Country Trails (FHCT) for grant preparation, project oversight and preliminary engineering by Landscape Architect and Planners, Inc., FHCT's consultant.

"This was the result of a true team effort by the school district, St. Mary of the Lake, the City of New Buffalo and Friends of Harbor Country Trails (FHCT)," said FHCT President Arnie Feinberg on July 15.

Feinberg also gave credit to the Berrien County Road Commission, Disability Network of Southwest Michigan, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, New Buffalo Township and the Michigan Department of Transportation.

Westerburg described the grant as a "jump start for the city for some much needed upgrades for sidewalks in the community."

Routes were selected based on student populations in the neighborhoods gathered from surveys and studies over the past two years. Included in the grant are: Bronson from U.S. 12 to East Clay; both sides of Indiana from Bronson to Taylor; the southeast side of Detroit Street near the elementary school; sidewalks on both sides of Clinton, Marshall, Monroe (north to Indiana Street), Eagle and Chicago streets to Indiana; sidewalks on both sides of Eagle and Chicago between Michigan and U.S. 12; Berrien and Willard between Mechanic and U.S. 12; and infills along U.S. 12 between Willard and Eagle streets.

While the bulk of the grant (\$562,000) will be allocated for infrastructure, an additional \$23,00 will be used for community education, including a bicycle rodeo, pedestrian safety assembly, a good neighbor program, mileage club and park and walk program.

In other school district business, Westerburg announced on July 14 that the 50-yard line had been laid on the new multiplex field with one green stripe and "it all goes from there."

Westerburg explained that lengths of string were used to determine the exact center of the field and all subsequent measurements must be within a quarter inch of the line as the carpet is laid and the track is paved. He said that recent rain had delayed work on the \$1.2 million project, but he hoped by Saturday the base carpet would be down and the track would have the first coat of pavement.

Food Service Director Patty Iazzetto gave an overview of the past year under the new federal

guidelines for its free and reduced lunch program and a preview of new requirements for the coming year.

She said it had been “hard” meeting requirements such as all whole grain rich for everything from a dinner roll to pizza crusts to chicken nuggets. “The kids don’t like it.”

“I understand why the government wants healthy food but it has been too fast. Even the vendors aren’t ready for it,” Iazzetto said, adding that Smucker’s had withdrawn its popular line of sandwiches rather than meet government standards.

Iazzetto said she was working hard to meet new standards for the coming year, including further restrictions on sodium, larger fruit portions and snack vending machines but was anticipating a new wave of “constructive” criticism.

“The only thing more regulated is the transportation department. It’s a science project to develop a menu that meets all the requirements,” Westerborg said, adding that the district’s 43 percent participation prevented the school from dropping out of the federal meal program.

“We’re up for the challenge. I have a great team that greet the children with smiles every day and understand the need for healthier choices,” Iazzetto said and plugged her new website that will have teacher curriculums, tips for parents, games for kids and even help with reaching the Spanish-speaking families in the district.

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