

Niles Township approves prep work for River Valley Trail

By [Craig Haupert](#)

An effort to complete the final portion of the Indiana Michigan River Valley Trail in Niles Township took a small step forward Monday.

During a special meeting, the township's board of trustees approved a contract with Wightman & Associates to stake out the final 1.5 miles of the trail for \$4,500. The board also hired Great Lakes Research to perform an archaeological study of the land on which the trail will run for another \$4,500.

Township officials said the study is necessary in order for the township to receive a trail grant from the Michigan Department of Transportation.

Marcy Colclough, senior planner with Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, said the township received a "conditional commitment" for the MDOT grant.

One of the conditions, she said, is that the township have an archaeological study of the area completed to make certain no historically significant artifacts would be damaged during the building of the multi-use path.

Colclough, who is assisting the township in the grant process, said the project is expected to cost approximately \$900,000 and that most of the cost would be paid for by two state grants — the aforementioned MDOT grant and another grant from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Niles Township applied for the MDNR grant last year, but was denied. Colclough said she is confident the township will be awarded the grant this year and that the deadline to re-apply for the grant is April 1.

If the township is awarded both grants, Colclough said construction could begin as early as the spring of 2017. Colclough said they would find out about the grant in December.

Supervisor Jim Stover said the board will use its next meeting to set a public hearing for the MDNR grant application.

An accompanying map shows the proposed location for the last phase of the trail in Niles Township.

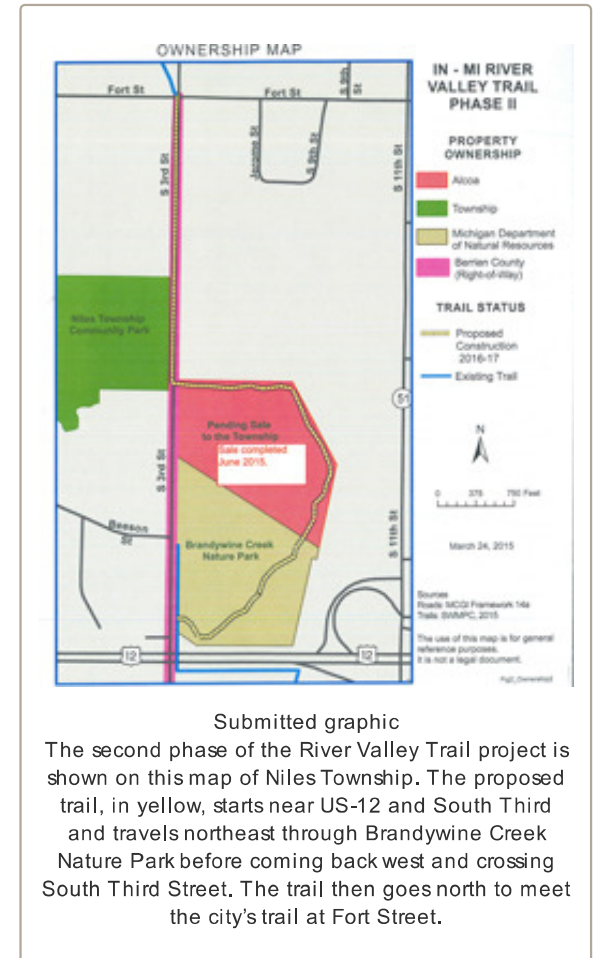
The path could change if Norfolk Southern allows the township to use unused railroad right-of-way for the trail. Stover said they are negotiating with Norfolk now.



The first phase of the River Valley Trail Project opened in August of 2014. It stretches 3.3 miles from the state line to Brandywine Creek Nature Park.

The entire trail, when finished, is expected to connect the City of Niles with Mishawaka, Indiana with 34 miles of trail.

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Submitted graphic

The second phase of the River Valley Trail project is shown on this map of Niles Township. The proposed trail, in yellow, starts near US-12 and South Third and travels northeast through Brandywine Creek Nature Park before coming back west and crossing South Third Street. The trail then goes north to meet the city's trail at Fort Street.