

Phase 2 trail work in Niles Twp. dependent on grants

By [Craig Haupt](#)

Construction on the second phase of the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail in Niles Township will not begin until the spring of 2017 at the earliest, according to township officials.

The township is dependent upon two state grants to pay for the majority of the estimated \$700,000 project, which would connect the township's portion of the trail to the City of Niles' portion of the trail.



Marcy Colclough, of the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, said the township has not received either of the two grants.

The first — a trust fund grant from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources — was denied. She said the township has not received official word on the other grant, which is from the Michigan Department of Transportation.

Colclough, who is assisting the township in the grant process, said she is optimistic that the township will be awarded the grants in the future.

"I think we have a really good chance at getting the MDNR grant in 2016. And, I think the MDOT is favorable too," she said. "Both MDNR and MDOT have already invested hefty amounts in phase one, so I think they will want to see this trail completed between the township and the city."

If the township receives both grants this year, Clerk Terry Eull said the earliest they could begin construction is the spring of 2017.

Supervisor Jim Stover said the state is requiring the township to perform an archaeological study of land on which the second phase of the trail would run — a one-mile section from Brandywine Nature Creek to Fort Street.

"We've already got the different EPA studies done and they are all acceptable," Stover said. "Now they are wanting to perhaps eliminate the possibility that there are some burial sites or something else on that property."

Township officials are also in talks with Norfolk Southern for the use of unused railroad right of way east of South Third Street for a portion of the trail.

That would allow the trail to travel behind (east of) the Modineer property before cutting back west to meet at the intersection of Fort and South Third Streets where the City of Niles' portion of the trail begins.

Otherwise, a significant portion of the trail would have to travel north along South Third Street to the Fort/South Third Street intersection.

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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