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## Sept. 25 open house set for trail project

Berrien Springs library will host event

By DEBRA HAIGHT - HP Correspondent 3 hrs ago

BERRIEN SPRINGS — A second open house for the proposed expansion of the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail will be held Sept. 25 in Berrien Springs. That news came Monday from Kris Martin of the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission at the Berrien Springs Village Council meeting.

Martin reported that the open house will run from 4:30 to 6 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 25 at the Berrien Springs Community Library. The first open house about the trail expansion project was held in May at the Niles-Buchanan YMCA in Niles.

He updated council members about the overall goal of the interstate trail project, what's been done so far and what the next steps are in expanding the trail northward to Berrien Springs.

The trail now set to run 34 miles from Mishawaka to Niles should be done by the end of 2020, he said. The section of the trail from U.S. 12 north to the Niles city limits will be done this year, while the section around Notre Dame on the Indiana side of the border will be done in 2020.

Martin said the SWMPC has been working with Be Healthy Berrien on the trail expansion project. Right now, the two organizations are applying for grants to pay for the first phases of the project, which involve planning and engineering. He said grant applications to pay for the actual construction of the trail are several years away.

“Trail planning does not take place overnight,” Martin said. “We’ve made progress over the last few months and we’re still working with stakeholders and the steering committee. Next year, we plan to apply for grants to better hone in on the route. We’re taking it one step at a time.”

The Sept. 25 open house will focus on a number of issues in addition to the trail route, such as good locations for trail heads and amenities to have along the trail such as benches, signage and bike repair stations.

Right now organizers are looking at using nine miles of the old interurban railroad right-of-way that runs from Niles to Rangeline Road south of Berrien Springs along a route parallel and west of M-139, he said.

Issues that have to be addressed in coming months and years include how to get the trail across M-139 near Niles. The trail currently ends in Plym Park on the city's north side. The park is on the east side of the road while the proposed trail is on the west side of the road.

As mentioned in the first open house in May, Martin expects people to again be looking at ways to extend the trail across and north of Lake Chapin. The concrete pillars that supported the interurban railroad that crossed Lake Chapin are still there and could potentially support a new pedestrian bridge.

Village President Milt Richter noted that more work would have to be done to explore whether the concrete pillars are even safe before the pedestrian bridge idea could go any further.

“One has fallen over, people would have to check them,” Richter said.

Martin estimated that the new trail expansion could cost between \$500,000 to \$1 million a mile to construct and emphasized that actual construction is “several years down the line.”

A final meeting to report on this phase of the planning process could take place either later this fall or early next year, he said.

Also at Monday's meeting, the council again delayed action on a proposed street light contract with the power company. They're waiting for more information on whether the village will actually save money by having I&M do the streetlights all at once, rather than replacing them as they go out.