



[https://www.heraldpalladium.com/news/local/trail-between-niles-berrien-springs-taking-shape/article\\_85f882f5-b161-5f18-b9a6-f7974b722959.html](https://www.heraldpalladium.com/news/local/trail-between-niles-berrien-springs-taking-shape/article_85f882f5-b161-5f18-b9a6-f7974b722959.html)

## Trail between Niles, Berrien Springs taking shape

Vision is there but many details remain

By DEBRA HAIGHT - HP Correspondent Apr 11, 2019

BERRIEN CENTER — The reality of a walking/biking trail between Niles and Berrien Springs is still years and millions of dollars away, but planning is underway, thanks to a grant received by the Be Healthy Berrien organization.

Be Healthy Berrien Director Heather Cole and Southwest Michigan Planning Commission Planner Marcy Hamilton attended the Berrien Township Board meeting on Tuesday to update members about plans for the proposed trail.

As currently envisioned, the trail will run north from Plym Park on the north side of Niles, to Berrien Springs along the old interurban right-of-way. Most of that right-of-way is now owned by American Electric Power and is parallel to and west of M-139, headed toward Berrien Springs.

Cole said preliminary planning is being paid for out of a \$90,000 state grant her organization has received. She said she expects to get a similar amount from the state over the next three to four years to continue the planning process.

Hamilton noted that people have dreamed about extending the Indiana Michigan River Valley Trail northward for at least 20 years. This year, the final section of trail in southern Niles Township will be completed, which means there will now be a continuous trail from Mishawaka through South Bend, and extending north to the Niles area.

“There will now be a continuous trail from the Niles YMCA to the stateline and beyond,” she said. “It’s used extensively and we’re really excited to secure this grant.”

She said AEP owns around 7 miles of the 9-mile stretch, with the city of Niles and Niles Township owning at least part of the remaining miles. The section owned by AEP ends at Range Line Park in Berrien Township.

Cole and Hamilton said people have already caught the vision of what the trail could be like and how it can be extended into Berrien Springs and beyond. Some have talked about building a pedestrian bridge across Lake Chapin using the concrete pillars already there.

Planning for the proposed trail will start in coming weeks and months. Cole said a series of three community open houses are being planned for Niles and Berrien Springs. The first will be held from 4-6 p.m. on May 7 at the Niles YMCA.

Hamilton encouraged township officials to start thinking about what they could contribute to the project, in terms of local matches for future grants. She said they will likely be applying for both Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund and Michigan Department of Transportation grants.

“Trail projects take a long time and are expensive,” she said. “The good thing is that the DNR and MDOT are interested in funding trail projects that connect to bigger systems. With this project, you can expect it to cost between \$500,000 and \$1 million a mile.”

## Shelton project

Also on Tuesday night, Berrien Township board members approved the special use request from Dan and Dave Shelton to open a wedding/special events venue in the township next year. The special use permit approval was recommended by the township’s planning commission after a public hearing the night before.

Conditions approved along with the request included having a decibel meter on site, not allowing more than 60 decibels of noise at the property line, no amplified music outside of the building, having ample parking and having a hedgerow around two sides of the property. Hours of operation are to be 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. seven days a week.

Board members also approved a special use permit for a new welding/fabrication shop being operated by Eric Armstrong in a barn on property he’s buying on M-140.

Board members also heard a presentation from Berrien County Drain Commissioner Christopher Quattrin about two local drains and then approved resolutions to start the process of repairing them. Clerk Mary Jane Dean said the projects also have to gain approval from the Pipestone Township Board.