

**VILLAGE OF GRAND BEACH
PUBLIC HEARING
MARQUETTE GREENWAY BICYCLE PATH
JUNE 23, 2018**

President Paul Leonard Jr. called the public hearing to order at 10:15 AM EST. Present in addition to Leonard were Frank Giglio, Deborah Lindley and Blake O'Halloran. James Bracewell was not in attendance.

O'Halloran moved, seconded by Giglio to adopt the agenda as presented. Motion carried unanimously 4-0.

Leonard explained that the public hearing was being held to take comments from the public on whether the Village should grant an easement for the use of land and removal of trees along Grand Beach Road to construct a portion of the Marquette Greenway bicycle path which will connect Chicago to New Buffalo.

He told those in attendance that Marcy Hamilton of Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) would provide visual information about the path which will connect Chicago to New Buffalo and eventually will go further north to Saint Joe. Most of the Greenway has been built; some of it has been planned and funded, but not yet built. In Grand Beach, it will run along Grand Beach Road up to Forest Beach and if they agree, it will run through Forest Beach and up into New Buffalo. Some of the land is owned by the Village, some owned by Grand Beach Land Development, including the 42 acres the Village is trying to purchase, and some of the land belongs to Chikaming Open Lands. He stated that today's public hearing is being held to deal with the land the Village owns and the impact it will have on the Village and what might be done with the trees along the path. The path will require 20' off the road which will include the 10' wide bike path with a 5' area on each side.

Leonard introduced Marcy Hamilton of SWMPC. Hamilton introduced Tony McGee of Abonmarche who has been helping with the engineering on this project. She said that there is also a group of about 15 people that have been meeting for a year to figure out how to get the trail into New Buffalo, with several of them in attendance.

Hamilton showed a slide presentation and said that trails are being constructed all around the country. She said that trails improve property values, help with exercise, and are safe for families, school children, commuters and long distance riders. They are used by bikers as well as walkers and joggers.

She said they learned that LaPorte County has the engineering plans and funding available to bring the Greenway to the state line along Grand Beach Road. Hamilton is an environmentalist and is concerned about tree removal along Grand Beach Road and said that they might be able to go around some of the large trees.

Hamilton said she has been at the Grand Beach Council meetings and listened to what the council has said. She explained that the proposed trail will come to Woodcrest on the lake side of Grand Beach Road, and then cross to the railroad track side there. Some of those trees will remain, and the path will continue past Royal Avenue on the railroad side. There is a safety concern with traffic entering Grand Beach Road from US 12, and if bicyclists were trying to cross there it would be very dangerous. That is why they plan to cross the road before the entrance off of 12 which also allows them to keep most of the burning bushes. The road right-of-way actually narrows when you get closer to Deer Park and they will have to work with Grand Beach Land Development (GBLD) and Chikaming Open Lands (COL) in that area. She said that Ellen Frankle of GBLD has said she is very in favor of the path, and Ryan Postema of

COL has talked with his board and is working with the Nature Conservancy who still has interest in the COL property. The path will need to cross over to the railroad side before reaching Deer Park Drive. The path will only be 5' off the road on the railroad side near Deer Park and they will have a buffer for the safety of the bikers. She thinks people driving cars feel safer when the bikers are off the roads rather than riding along the roads.

Her agency has been working on funding with estimated costs for the 3.8 miles from the state line to downtown New Buffalo at roughly \$4,000,000. The good news is that there are a lot of grants available for this type of project. There is state and federal money available and The Pokagon Fund will contribute \$300,000, New Buffalo Township is contributing \$150,000 and the City of New Buffalo will contribute \$38,500. Grand Beach contributed to the cost of the survey which could be helpful to the Village in the future. Grand Beach has not been asked to contribute any funds for the project.

Leonard read emails and letters of support for the Greenway that were received from Sally and Robert Barnes, William Callahan Jr., Jim and Debbie Krillenberger and Judith & Patrick Blackburn.

Leonard said the first question to be addressed at the hearing is are we in favor of and should the Village provide an easement for the proposed bike path? The second question is which side of the road do we want the path to come down. In the newer section of the Village, there is much less room between Grand Beach Road and Amtrak. The Amtrak easement is 50' on each side from the center of the tracks and Amtrak doesn't want to give away any land.

There will be tree removal, particularly as you go further along Grand Beach Road to the north. Traffic does not pay attention for bikes when they come off the highway with traffic coming from New Buffalo and Michigan City which is why they considered crossing over Grand Beach Road before approaching that intersection.

Hamilton said the path could deviate around old growth trees if the Village agreed to it, but it is the Village's decision. She said there is a horrible safety issue at trying to get bikers up on to US 12. The people they have been working with have said that it will not be a nice experience riding bikes between semi-trucks and trains and that is the reason they are working to keep the path off of the highway.

The following Grand Beach property owners or family members made comments about their opposition or support for the path along Grand Beach Road with five people speaking against the path along Grand Beach Road and ten people speaking in favor of the proposed path:

Jorge Alvarez
John Deaner
Frank Dolan
Joe Farwell
Linda McHugh Fox
Jaime Frankle
Dennis Grether
Randall Macheliski
Sheila McGinnis
Kieran McHugh
Ben Mercieri
Sue Mercieri
Jay Shannon

Steve Slater
Susan Sonderby
Ken Terpin

Many people spoke about their concerns with tree removal. There were concerns about drainage and utilities near the Fifteen Acres. It was suggested to run the path along US Highway 12 and Wilson Road. There were concerns about other communities such as Forest Beach allowing the path to run through their properties. There were comments that bicyclists don't follow traffic rules and signs. There were concerns about the path crossing back and forth across Grand Beach Road especially near the tracks where the traffic moves fairly quickly.

There was a concern about who would take care of the path once built and Marcy Hamilton stated that New Buffalo Township committed on the grant request to take care of the path. The City of New Buffalo will take care of the path through the city.

In response to the suggestion to run the path along US 12 and Wilson Road, Arnie Feinberg of Friends of Harbor Country Trails said that they have been looking very hard for several years at the Wilson Road option. He said the first problem with the Wilson Road option and crossing Highway 12 to the lake side of the highway required an easement of approximately 3' from Amtrak. They talked with Amtrak and they are very tough to deal with. The problem with constructing a path on the opposite side of Highway 12 is that there are many driveways and it is dangerous with all of the cars pulling out of the driveways. On one side of 12 you have 18 wheelers going 70 mph and people pulling out of driveways and the other side requires an easement from Amtrak which is close to impossible. Friends of Harbor Country worked very hard on this and they've heard from people that they won't ride their bikes along Highway 12.

Others felt that Grand Beach Road is a much safer option than Highway 12 with avid cyclists saying they would not ride along 12, nor would they take their children for a ride along 12 because it is too dangerous with traffic traveling 60 mph and faster. Some felt that it is much safer to have the bikes on a path off of the road than to have them on the side of the road or on the road as is the current situation. Someone said that people come here to be healthy and this would allow them to ride or walk along a path, and a community with a trail system provides safety, health and recreational benefits. It was said that trails increase home values and have economic and safety benefits. Someone said that we are part of a larger community than Grand Beach and that Village property owners go to Michigan City and New Buffalo for dining and shopping, so we have a responsibility to do what we can to thoughtfully support the preservation and furtherance of this entire community and its entertainment and recreation. A comment was made that it is very dangerous when you turn right over the tracks with bikers, walkers and baby strollers, so it would be much safer to have these people off the road rather than on the shoulder or on Grand Beach Road. Someone suggested we focus on making the intersection at the tracks safer. A comment was made that this is something that will benefit everyone in Grand Beach including their kids and grandkids.

New Buffalo resident Don Stoneburner told those in attendance about an experience he had when he lived in Fort Wayne as the president of a condo association. They wanted to put a bike path in to connect to a very large bike path in the city, but there was much opposition and concern from condo owners and board members, but in the end the path was built and the people that were opposed began using the path often. He said if the Village allows the path to run along Grand Beach Road, there will be much benefit to the children and adults of the Village who will be able to use the path to ride to schools and other areas outside of the Village.

With no further comments from the audience, Leonard moved, seconded by O'Halloran to close the public hearing. Motion carried unanimously 4-0.

With no further business, the public hearing was closed at 12:01 AM EST.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mary J. Robertson
Clerk-Treasurer