

All,

Our new directories will be finished by next week. We will work to deliver these to all members who have paid their 2009 dues.

I would also like to apologize for an error I did on the last memo.

Our young Samantha Graves took second place in the Chili Cook-Off and I took third, not the other way around! Sorry, Sam, did not mean to take away your second place accomplishment.

Carolyn and Mark Mossing has a daughter who will be a senior in college, has a vehicle and is looking for full time work as a nanny during the months of June, July and half of August. Her name is Laura Mossing and she can be contacted at 581-1663.

There have been several articles about the "raid" on the township offices about a meeting not properly noticed. Below is a summary of the situation from Paul Knoerl, our township trustee:

Sierra Consultant's contract as sewer O&M provider was terminated, effective May 6, 2009. Talks and negotiations had been underway for more than 6 months concerning reductions needed in annual sewer O&M costs and re-negotiation of Sierra's contract terms with the Township. Obviously, a mutually beneficial agreement was never reached.

After the decision was made to terminate Sierra's contract, one of their employees allegedly contacted the state attorney's general's office, who in turn, contacted Kent County Sheriff's Dept, concerning an alleged violation of the open meetings act.. This related to a special board meeting on October 27th concerning previous lagoon overflow at the Grattan sewer irrigation site in 2008. Discussions over the past year have been held regarding who was/is responsible for the lagoon overflows and associated costs.

The allegation is that the Oct. 27th meeting notice was not posted on the office front door the minimum 18 hours required prior to meeting. Board members had received email from Supervisor 10 days prior to meeting taking place that a public meeting would take place on this date. No decisions or votes were taken at the Oct. 27th meeting. It was informational only with Prein & Newhoff present at meeting. I was out of town and did not attend 10/27 meeting.

Kent County Sheriff Dept. took three Grattan Twp computers to gather information relative to the Oct. 27th meeting and noticing of meeting. They are preparing their report on their investigation and sending it to the Kent County Prosecutors office for review in next week or so.

Paul Knoerl

There is also much activity on the trail systems in our area and wanted to give you an update on an overview on three different trail systems in the Lowell area being developed.

Currently the North Country Trail is a hiking trail from NY State to ND passing through Lowell. The national headquarters of this extensive trail system is located in downtown Lowell.

Below is an article about the Rails to Trails program the communities, townships and counties this 37 mile trail will run through. It is the Greenville to Lowell and Lowell to Ionia. The money for the right of way for the Ionia to Lowell portion has been raised and the Greenville to Lowell portion should be done in the near future. The plan is to then raise money for the paving and maintenance of this future paved riding and hiking trail.

Here is the latest article in the paper about this new trail system all in the area can enjoy at some future date.

The Thursday, January 29, 2009 Daily News, Jessica Dudenhofer gave an update on the progress of the new trail on the abandoned railroad bed from Greenville to Lowell. The article titled "City lists 3 trail concerns" was a welcome and timely news release on the progress of the *acquisition* of this corridor. Acquisition of the route is only the first step in connecting the Fred Meijer Heartland Trail, the Fred Meijer Flat River Trail south to Lowell and then east to Ionia and Owosso.

Since first meeting in May 2007, cities, villages, townships and interested trail enthusiasts have been working together through a Community Action Committee to preserve the MidMichigan Railroad corridor from Ionia to Greenville, for the eventual development of a railtrail. Railtrails allow local communities to connect with each other. These trail corridors provide safe recreational havens for families to enjoy healthy activities, including biking, hiking, walking dogs, rollerblading and jogging. Study after study shows that these trails promote economic development, increased tourism, green space preservation, increased property values and healthier people in all the communities they touch.

Now that the Community Action Committee and its partners have successfully preserved the Ionia to Lowell corridor, our efforts are focusing on the acquisition of the route from Lowell to Greenville. The cost to purchase the 22 miles from Foreman Road in Lowell to M-57 in Greenville is \$1,300,000. Fundraising efforts for acquisition have been the highest priority for this team of hopeful trail builders. Supporting funders have been the Meijer Foundation, Frey Foundation, Lowell Area Community Fund, and Greenville Area Community Foundation. The team is currently focused on a potential Michigan Department of Transportation Enhancement Grant to complete the funding.

During the process of securing funds to purchase the corridor, letters of support from government units along the route are very helpful ensuring our success. This trail will be a welcome addition to all communities it reaches just as other trails in or near Greenville have been successful.

City Manager Bosanic was quoted as saying, "Significant portions of the trails in Lowell and Belding are getting purchased and developed. We would like to be treated the same." It should be pointed out that very little of the trail will actually follow rail corridors in the City of Lowell. In Lowell the Railroad is not abandoning most of the rail that goes through residential and commercial areas. This is not the case in Belding, Greenville, Saranac and Ionia. The Community Action Committee is specifically working with the Railroad to purchase the corridor that has been "railbanked" which preserves the corridor for future rail use should that ever be profitable. The portions of trail that the City Manager wants to add to the project are not railbanked and therefore not part of this purchase.

Both Lowell and Belding have demonstrated their enthusiasm by providing letters of support to assist in our fundraising. It would be great if the City of Greenville would also support this project to connect communities

As the current project coordinator for the West Michigan Trails and Greenways Coalition, I have been proud to be a part of this dynamic group of community leaders.

Through their dedication, we have built partnerships and forged cooperation up and down the abandoned railroad corridor. Our strong alliance includes the Friends of Fred Meijer Heartland Trail, Friends of CIS Trail, Lowell Area Recreation Authority, Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Michigan Department of Transportation, Montcalm, Kent, and Ionia County Governments, Grand Valley Metro Council, Greenville and Lowell Area Chambers of Commerce, and 13 local government units along the corridor. As we complete the final acquisition phases and move on to trail development, we look forward to expanding our alliances to achieve the vision of the 5th longest railtrail in the United States, connecting partner communities along a unified trail system of more than 120 miles.

The third trail system is the local Lowell Trail system known as LARA. The first phase of this system will start at the Lowell High School and run toward downtown, looking to connect into the other trail systems at some future date.

There is a meeting planned at City Hall this Wednesday. Below is a memo about that meeting if you would like to attend to learn more about these plans and give any input.

The Lowell Area Recreation Authority will conduct a public meeting on Wednesday, March 11, 2009 at 6:00 p.m. at the Lowell Charter Township offices, 2910 Alden Nash Road, Lowell Michigan for the purpose of receiving input and comments from the public on the following:

- Proposed Lowell Area Recreation Authority Trailway 5 year Recreation Plan
- Proposed application to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Trust Fund for Phase 1 of the Lowell Area Recreation Authority Trail.

Copies of the proposed Recreation Plan are available for viewing at the City of Lowell, Lowell Township, Vergennes Township and the Lowell (Englehardt) Public Library.

Interested persons may offer comments at the meeting or submit them prior to the meeting directly to the City of Lowell, Lowell Township or Vergennes Township or you may email them to info@lowellareatrailway.org.

Mari Stone

Secretary

Lowell Trailway Authority Seeks Input to Recreation Plan & Grant Application

Lowell is slowly turning into one of the prime locations for walking and biking trails in West Michigan; the existing North Country Trail, the upcoming Safe Routes to School trail, and the proposed Greenville and Ionia rail-trails to name a few. This is good news to the Lowell Area Recreation Authority (LARA) who will be holding a public meeting on Wednesday, March 11, 2008 at 6 p.m. at the Lowell Township offices to seek input and comments on their proposed 5 year Recreation Plan and a proposed grant application to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Trust Fund for Phase 1 of their trailway masterplan.

The proposed Phase 1 LARA trail will connect to the Cherry Creek Elementary Safe Routes to School trail along Gee Drive and to the future Lowell to Greenville rails to trail project at Foreman Rd. Future phases of the LARA trail are planned to connect these pathways to the North Country Trail and to the future Lowell to Ionia rail trail project.

The Lowell Area Recreation Authority was formed in 2004 under a cooperative agreement between the Boards of Lowell Township, Vergennes Township and the City of Lowell for the purpose of building a non-motorized trail network in the Lowell Area.

The MDNR grant is for up to \$500,000 to be used towards the construction of Phase 1 of which will connect Cherry Creek Elementary School with Lowell High School and the **Wittenbach/Wege Agri-Science** and Environmental Center via a non-motorized trail along Foreman Road and Alden Nash Road.

In addition to the MDNR grant, LARA is seeking funding from other state and local programs, private and community foundations and private fundraising so that no local public funds from the Townships or City will be used to construct the trails.

All interested persons are encouraged to attend the March 11 meeting or provide your input to the trail in other ways. The proposed 5 year Recreation Plan and public input forms are available at the City of Lowell, Vergennes Township and Lowell Township offices as well as the Englehardt Public Library. More information about the proposed LARA trail can be viewed at the Authority's web page www.lowellareatrailway.org.

“Public input is really important to the development of the trail and to the success of the grant application” according to Lowell resident Dave Austin of Williams & Works, who is assisting the Authority with the grant application and the trail design. “We want to hear from all groups, young and old and persons of all abilities so that this trail can be universally accessible to all.”

Our Spring Meeting is planned for May 12 at the Grattan Township Hall. We would hope you plan on attending and we can review these two issues as well as several other programs.

Alan