

Bike trail proposal may be derailed

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Resistant landowners, upset neighbors may doom path despite village getting \$45,000 DNR grant

Plans for an east-side extension of the Village of Fredonia's bike/pedestrian path are in jeopardy because of resistance from some key property owners, officials learned last week.

That snag is fine with a group of more than a dozen area residents who attended last week's Village Board meeting, voicing their objections to the trail.

Village President Chuck Lapicola said negotiations have been ongoing with five property owners who would need to sell easements to make the trail from South Milwaukee Street to Fredonia Avenue a possibility.

However, neighbors said one of those landowners assured them they had no interest in making their property available for the trail.

Lapicola said village officials would meet with landowners to verify whether there is waning interest in the trail.

"The plan has to be on a willing-seller basis. If the owner of a key parcel doesn't want it, that would stop the trail," he said.

The village has already received the promise of a \$45,000 grant from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to create an extension of the Marie Kraus Trail, which runs west to Waubedonia Park.

That money, however, could be returned if the village chooses not to build the trail.

St. Rose Avenue resident Charlene Landing spoke on behalf of many of her neighbors, saying they felt the trail would infringe on their privacy and property rights.

Landing said none of her neighbors supported the trail being located near their homes.

She said there is concern that the trail will bring strangers into their neighborhood, and would invite vandalism and trespassing.

A particular target of the residents is the plan to include an underpass at the east end of the trail, to allow pedestrians and bike riders a safe route across Fredonia Avenue.

Officials said the 10-foot-wide, paved culvert which has been included as an alternate in the plans for the reconstruction of Fredonia Avenue could be used by children heading to the Northern Ozaukee School District campus.

"I know we already have an increasing problem in our town with drugs. I am concerned there is

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going to be activity in that tunnel,” Landing said.

“I can see how that tunnel would attract sex molesters. There is going to be drug dealing in there. Is it really going to keep our kids safe? I don’t think so.”

Village Marshal Mike Davel, who is a full-time police officer in Port Washington, said his experience with the Interurban Trail there has shown that bike trails are not magnets for crime.

“There is very little crime associated with the Interurban Trail,” Davel said. “In my 20 years in Port, I can count on one hand the number of problems we have had on the bike path.”

The comments did little to reassure the neighbors about the trail.

“We don’t want it. There’s got to be something better,” Landing said.

Facing a room of upset residents, Lapidola said officials had to weigh the interests of all sides.

“We have to look at the good of the entire village. I can’t think of one decision that we make that makes everyone happy, other than eliminating taxes,” he said.

Even without a formal vote, it seems the future of the bike trail is tenuous and the prospect of a Fredonia Avenue underpass is all but dead.

Four trustees — Lisa Dohrwardt, Don Dohrwardt, Jill Bertran and Fritz Buchholtz — said they could not support a trail plan that included an underpass.

Trustees agreed to return the grant, killing the trail proposal, if Lapidola is unsuccessful in a last-minute attempt to secure all of the needed rights-of-way.

Trustee Scott Ehaney said he was sorry to see plans for the trail falling apart.

“It is too bad we have a bike trail on the west side of the village that goes nowhere and we already got the grant,” Ehaney said.

“There are a lot of people who support it, but they are not the ones who show up at meetings. It is too bad for the village.”