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Although trustees have already endorsed proposal, committee asked to suggest alternative routes for path

The Village of Fredonia's ambitious park plan encountered little resistance during its review process.

That smooth sailing encountered an abrupt change of course last week, when concerned residents showed up at last week's Plan Commission meeting.

Although a public hearing was held and the Village Board has already approved the ambitious 46-page plan, it was presented to the planning body because the village would need to acquire land to implement certain elements of the proposal — specifically the extension of a bike path from Wheeler Street to the park-and-ride lot on the east end of Fredonia Avenue.

Village President Chuck Lapicola has championed the expanded trail system, contending it will connect key areas of the community and promote a healthy lifestyle for residents of all ages.

Lapicola even prepared a summary sheet with 22 talking points supporting the logic for the trail, including the assertion that the path would increase local property values.

However, a handful of residents from the area around St. Rose Avenue voiced their concerns about the plan at the commission meeting.

St. Rose Avenue resident Al Carmody said the proposed route of the trail would come very close to lot lines.

"The way the trail is drawn, it would come right into our back yards, practically," Carmody said.

He also asked whether the village would be condemning property to gain the land needed for the trail, but was told by Lapicola that the village has identified a willing seller of the land needed south of St. Rose Avenue.

Ultimately, Lapicola said an expanded bike trail may allow the village to work around a state Department of Transportation requirement that a bike lane be incorporated into the redesign of Fredonia Avenue.

"We are trying to come up with a plan that will keep us from having to widen Fredonia Avenue, which would result in removing all of the trees, the adding of lots of retaining walls on the north side of the street and steeper slopes on the south side of the street," he said.

"And even if a bike lane is added, I am not sure I would want children riding on a four-foot lane on Fredonia Avenue."

The significance of that argument was not lost on Plan Commission member Scott Roberts, who lives on Fredonia Avenue.

“If we have to add a four-foot-wide bike lane to Fredonia Avenue, you might be talking about sending traffic through people’s living rooms,” Roberts said.

Lapicola said the proximity of the trail to nearby homes is intentional.

“I wouldn’t want a path away from homes. It would be too isolated. I think it would be great to have you people in the proximity to keep things safe,” he told the neighbors.

That prospect didn’t sit well with neighbor Bill Richards.

“I bought my property because it backs onto an open farm field. I would certainly help anyone who needs help, but I am not interested in being a defender of people on the trail or having 500 people stroll by my yard on a nice summer evening,” Richards said.

Lapicola said now is the time to make progress on planning for such recreational facilities as the trail, when large swaths of undeveloped land are still available.

He also said the trail and other components of the parks plan could be covered by grant money, meaning the recreational facilities could be provided to the community at a considerable discount.

Lapicola said the bike path is still in the draft stage, and provisions could be made to add trees and landscaping that would buffer neighboring properties from the trail users.

Plan Commission member Bill Hamm sympathized with the neighbors.

“If I was living there, I wouldn’t want (the path) there either,” Hamm said.

The commission then agreed to send the park plan back to the Parks and Recreation Committee to come up with three alternate routes for the trail.