

Alternative trail routes gain support

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Residents of St. Rose Avenue have fewer objections the farther bike path is from their homes

Village of Fredonia officials were surprised by the negative reaction some neighbors had to plans to extend a proposed bike trail to the east side of the village.

That opposition eased somewhat last week, when about a half-dozen neighbors from the St. Rose Avenue area met with the village's Parks Committee.

The neighbors showed up at a Plan Commission meeting last month, objecting to a proposed bike trail from Wheeler Street to the park-and-ride lot on the east end of Fredonia Avenue would pass close to their backyards.

The commission withheld support of the trail plan until the Parks Committee came up with some alternative routes for the path.

Village President Chuck Lapicola, who largely crafted the village's parks plan, came up with two alternate trail plans — although neither was dramatically different from the initial proposal. All involved use of a farm field south of St. Rose Avenue owned by the Nieland family.

One alternative route would place the trail along a tree line on the south side of the field, heading north at about the mid-point of the field — in line with Wilson Avenue.

Lapicola said that route might not be acceptable to the Nieland family, because it could interfere with drainage. There have been no serious talks with the owners about the availability of the land.

Another option would be to extend the trail along the tree line for the length of the field, essentially heading north at a point that roughly lines up with Highland Drive.

In all cases, Lapicola said the hope is that the village can secure grant money to pay for the trail.

He said no engineering studies have been prepared for any of the possible routes, saying it would be premature to spend money on the plans at this time.

"This would be an improvement to the village at a minimum cost. The intent is to spend little or no village tax money for this path, but I don't want it to look like we are trying to run anything down anyone's throats," he said.

"We are not looking to just spend taxpayers' money."

Lapicola said the trail extension is being proposed in conjunction with the pending

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reconstruction of Fredonia Avenue.

He said the state routinely requires that four-foot bike paths be incorporated into any redesign of roads that receive state funding. The village hopes to gain 80% funding for the project, with the remaining amount to be split between the village and county.

Lapicola said by having a bike trail plan in place, he hoped the state would waive the required paths along Fredonia Avenue.

That would eliminate having to take additional land for right-of-way from properties along the village's key east-west thoroughfare.

"We want to find a way to keep kids on bikes off that street," Lapicola said.

The neighbors at the committee meeting said they preferred the last option, which keeps people farthest from their homes.

That view didn't sit well with Trustee Scott Ehaney, a member of the committee.

"If you live in a semi-urban environment, which is what we have in Fredonia, you have to expect paths to be put in and improvements to be made," Ehaney said.

Even if the bike trail isn't developed, Trustee Fritz Buchholtz, chairman of the committee, said changes are likely in the farm field.

"The nice thing about this trail is that it would keep something like baseball diamonds from being placed there," Buchholtz said.

Neighbor Ken Worzalla said he preferred the alternate routes to the original trail, but didn't want officials to think there is a general sentiment against the amenity.

"We don't oppose the trail, just the first location," Worzalla said.

"I am sure 99.5% of the people in the village don't care where the trail goes, but as long as you're asking me, my preference is to put it along the tree line."

However, two Fredonia Avenue residents, Caralee and Jerome Jacque, said any trail would be welcomed. The couple lives on the far east end of the proposed trail route.

"We are all for the trail. Wherever you can do it is fine with us," Caralee Jacque said.