



**Public Information Session and Board Meeting
March 11, 2009 @ 6:00 pm
Lowell Township Hall**

Present:

LARA Board Members: Al Halbeisen, Mari Stone, Perry Beachum, Jim Pfaller, Dan Edwards, Betsy Davidson and Linda Regan.

Guests: Dave Austin; Williams & Works, and 25 members of the Lowell Community.

Dave Austin began the meeting by explaining that the proposed 5 year Recreation Plan and Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant application have been developed by the LARA Board and that it is the community's turn to offer comments and suggest any revisions before they are submitted.

Regarding the Recreation Plan, Austin explained the three different trail projects being developed in the Lowell Community, and showed how all three intersect on Foreman Road. He outlined the goals and objectives, and explained the 5 year plan and what it involves. The floor was then opened for public comment.

Janet Edwards, a Vergennes Township resident, spoke from her perspective as a Recreational Therapist. She has been involved as a volunteer for LARA, and has presented to several community groups, including Laurels of Kent, a physical rehabilitation/elder care facility in Lowell. The director there told Edwards that they would definitely use the trail for outings. They currently transport patients to the community trail in Rockford, about 20 miles away, and would experience decreased costs and more frequent trail visits when the Lowell Trailway is available.

Edwards also reported that the Director of Special Education for Lowell Area Schools is also looking forward the availability of this trail for their students. Cherry Creek Elementary has a community based program for autistic children and the principal there is excited to be adjacent to the trail for these students. She went on to say that no one she has spoken to had any concerns beyond street crossings and parking lots for shuttle busses and wheelchair access. She said that these concerns have been addressed in the planned route of Phase I. "Many people, including myself, will recreate through anything, but not everyone can. Some folks NEED a trail in order to recreate, and I am here to advocate for them".

Gary Goff, a Lowell Township resident and retired Lowell Area Schools teacher, asked about the pond adjacent to Cherry Creek Elementary. This pond is on school district property, but is difficult for the public to access for fishing and nature walks. He would like it very much to be accessed by the trail in some way. Board member Perry Beachum responded that there are plans to develop a nature trail off of the paved trail for this purpose, and that there will be signage there, as well as at several other public sites that

this phase will pass by or connect. These include the 34 acre Cooper Woodland Preserve, and the 60 acre Wege Natural Area/Wittenbach Agri-science Center.

Leo Pfaller, President of Lowell Area Senior Housing, spoke about the many active residents who bike for recreation. Several regularly load up their bikes and drive to the White Pine Trail to bike safely. Many residents take the shuttle bus they offer to the local malls in order to walk “off road”, and would use the trail in good weather instead. When asked about any special needs of Seniors in Lowell, Pfaller noted access to the nearby Stoney Creek Park and nature trail. This need would be fulfilled in Phase II.

The Board discussed the plan, and made several minor additions and corrections. Beachum motioned to adopt the 2009-2014 Recreation Plan for the Lowell Area Recreation Authority, and Jim Pfaller seconded. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion carried unanimously.

Austin went on to explain the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant application. He noted that LARA is currently conducting a Capitol Campaign to raise the local matches required for these kinds of funds. He invited community comment.

Leo Pfaller stated he is supportive of the trail, but wondered about using the existing sewer easement to the High School. The board replied concerning several issues; visibility, safety, topography, and secondary easement problems.

Jan Thompson, Vergennes Township, asked about potential changes to the plan after submission. Austin responded that LARA will be working closely with the DNR, and that part of the process involves a site visit. We will follow their lead with any necessary changes.

Dave Thompson, also of Vergennes, stated his support for the project. He commented that as a former High School coach in an urban area, he was astounded when he moved to rural Lowell to see our student athletes training along the road ways. He sees this situation as a safety issue, and urged the community to build the trail ASAP.

Gary Goff asked regarding the proximity of the road to the trail pavement. The response was that a substantial separation is required and planned. Discussion on pedestrian and vehicular uses on the High School property was held – the district administration has been consulted and noted that the public already uses the site heavily. There will be coordinated pedestrian markings and signage for trail users on the property, and every effort will be made to keep vehicle and pedestrian traffic separate.

Jeff Eckstrom of the City of Lowell commented that he has used these kinds of trails in other communities and he is enthusiastic about the funding plans.

Perry Beachum spoke of the advantages offered to the entire community by this project. From the Chamber of Commerce to the Health Care Community there has been tremendous support, and he is excited to see Lowell becoming a “hub” for regional trails.

Dan Edwards read the grant application and resolution of support and commitment for local match to the gathered community members. He motioned to adopt the resolution, Mari Stone seconded, and a roll call vote was taken. The motion carried unanimously. Austin noted that application will be made to MDOT for funding as well, and that it is common to see these funds leverage each other. The Governor is encouraging trail networks across the state, and in conversations with MDOT, Austin is hearing positive feedback about the potential for regional connections in Lowell.

At this point, the Board continued with regular business.

Meeting Minutes - Minutes of the February meeting were approved.

LARA Treasurers Report

Betsy Davidson presented the new format for the Treasurers Report. There is much more detail, and ability to follow individual granted projects. Discussion was held regarding maximum expenditures without prior board approval. The policy will be reviewed in April. Invoices were approved, and the Treasurers Report was approved.

Old Business

Expo Planning – Coming up on March 28th. There will be a presentation by the Capitol Campaign Committee at 11 am, with a quick history of the LARA efforts. Several dignitaries will be there. Local officials will be formally invited.

New Business – none

Standing Committee Reports –

Wege property easement is complete on our end – there has been an appraisal made as to the value of the easement, we are waiting to hear from them to sign off. An offer of compensation will be made, as required by MDOT funding.

The Elmdale rail easement is moving through the courts, and Davidson will keep us informed of this progress.

It was suggested that business cards be created with contact information for the Board. It was agreed that the Chair should serve as official spokesperson in public communications of importance, and that board members should direct the media and citizens with major questions to the Chair.

Meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

The foregoing constitutes my understanding of matters discussed and conclusions reached. Please review and share your additions or corrections at our joint Public Meeting and Board Meeting on **Wednesday April 8, 2009 at 6 pm, Vergennes Township Hall.**

Respectfully submitted,
Mari Stone, Secretary

For more information refer to the website www.lowellareatrailway.org