

Next Generation “Strengthening Our Niche” Work-Group Meeting Notes of June 1, 2009

Present

Will Andresen, Bonnie Bauaszak, Tom Bergman, Annette Burchell, Steve Frank, John Garske, Charlene Herron-Jordon, Jason Hofstede, Kelly Klein, Serena Mershon-Lohkamp, Toni Sendra, Dick Swanson

Regional Trail Mapping

John Garske, of the Trail Routes subgroup, proposed that the group focus on creating a bike trail that parallels Old US 2. Steve Frank indicated this fits with the Historical Sites subgroup’s proposal of getting the route that includes Hwy 77 from Mellen, through downtown Ironwood, onto Old US 2 to Wakefield designated as a federal “scenic byway” and/or the corollary state designation. This change in focus from trying to map out a hiking/biking/skiing trail using old railroad grades to having a paved trail following Hwy 77 and US 2 (“Gogebic-Iron Range Heritage Trail”? “Miners Memorial Trail”?) was agreed upon by those present. Some of the discussion related to this topic included the following:

- trying to use the railroad grades has a lot of issues associated with it at this time (legal muddy waters with respect to DNR/ownership/usage, potential competition with motorized usage, some parts have been physically closed off, success could be years away)
- linking the communities is a common goal of this group, as well as many other groups in the area, so even though the off-road hiking/biking trail might be the ideal, a historical biking route that follows roads already in place has a higher potential for successful implementation at this time
- this could serve as a ‘proof of concept’ for the economic development potential associated with nonmotorized trails, thus potentially paving the way for more ‘rugged’ trails in the future
- most of the heritage/mining sites are already clustered around Old US 2, thus allowing easy access to the historical sites
- shoulder vs separate parallel lane? – the desire would be to have a separate, two-way path (~10ft wide, 5ft for each direction) when going between the towns
- each community would be responsible for creating their own hiking/biking stops/spurs/loops/etc, but this group could do some of the background work, then individuals from this group could get involved with the Parks and Rec committees in their communities to champion the efforts (including getting the concept into Parks and Rec plans as is typically required for funding)
- this group should do cost estimates and provide a list of potential funding resources to each community (some mentioned: RCTA grants, health promotion-type grants, historical-heritage grants, Safe Paths to Schools)
- it is important to get each community involved early in the process (bring them in to create the proposal, don’t bring a near complete proposal to them)

- Little Blue Bus is in the process of getting bike racks, so it may be possible to use them so bikers can ride more of the trail instead of having to double back
- To more directly link this current trail concept with the goal of drawing young people to our communities to live, members of each community should consider family-friendly city bike routes that link the Heritage trail to residential sites, family centers, shopping centers, and local parks and trails

Action Points and Next Steps

- ➔ John Garske will confer with his contact at the Michigan DOT to truth test this concept and look for possible funding
- ➔ John will work with Jim to highlight the route in question, along with mining sites and potential trails to those sites so it can be used as a tool to show to each individual community the potential in linking everyone together.
- ➔ Steve Frank will research the requirements for federal and state (MI and WI) 'scenic byway' status
- ➔ Individuals should begin looking at their communities for potential bike paths connecting to the proposed route

Strengthening the Niche to Local Decision Makers

During a general discussion about what we can do to sell the "niche" idea to local decision makers (a few specific things mentioned: write more letters, send pictures and/or articles to the Daily Globe and Superior Chronicle, get groups together to use existing trails), Will Andresen suggested that educating our community leaders is important, but is not proving to be enough. He mentioned the concept of "community-based social marketing" as a method to encourage changes in thinking and behavior. He will send out more information on this topic for our group to consider.

The group indicated we should find statistics related to the number of cyclists that come to this area already.

Action Points and Next Steps

- ➔ gather stats about cycling in the area: Dick will contact WUPTR (?) for potential stats; Serena will check out a few websites mentioned during the meeting; others are encouraged to do research as well
- ➔ educate ourselves about "community based social marketing"

Next Meeting

Monday, July 13, 12 noon, Board Room of the Iron County Courthouse (NOTE: due to the holiday weekend, the meeting is the *second Monday* in July)