

**City of Portage
Committee of the Whole
Council Chambers, Municipal Building
115 W. Pleasant Street, Portage, WI
September 30, 2014
7:00 p.m.**

Council Members Present: Kutzke, Charles, Maass, Monfort, Klapper, Lynn, Hamburg and Council President Dodd

Also Present: Mayor Tierney, Fred Galley, Bob Redelings, Steve Sobiek, Ken Manthey, Clayton Simonson, Jesse Spankowski, Shawn Murphy, members of the public and press.

Excused: Havlovik

Council President called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm. Roll was taken.

Discussion and Possible Recommendation of Proposed PATHS program.

Dodd recognized Fred Galley, a charter member of the Portage Area Trails & Heritage System (PATHS) program. Galley provided a brief summary of the PATHS program history, referencing several studies conducted since the 1960's. Galley provided a summary of the proposed PATHS map noting significant trail locations and history. Galley referenced the trail construction in coordination with the Canal rehabilitation. Segment 1 of the Canal (Wis River to Adams St) was completed in 2006. A section of that trail from Highway 33 to the Indian Agency House was completed in 2001 and the middle section (Adams St to RR crossing) is in design phase currently.

Maass noted that in order to permanently maintain the trail system, easements or property purchases would need to be obtained for those segments crossing private property. City investment in the PATHS program would require permanent title or easement.

Dodd recognized Bob Redelings, City Engineer who provided an overview of the PATHS map the City has been working on. The PATHS program consists of off-road multi-purpose (paved and un-paved) trails, sidewalks and bike lanes. Redelings further explained that one loop of the total system was analyzed in detail to develop a detailed and comprehensive cost. Loop 4 on the map (southwest corner of City) including Edgewater Conant, River Sts, CTH O and W. Wisconsin st. Identification of easements, topographic issues and crossings. A cost estimate of \$396,000 was compiled.

G. Meisgeier urged the City to re-visit the Welcome Center. The Welcome Center was planned as a focal point of the PATHS program, information center and permanent home to the Chamber of Commerce. This facility was designed with an initial cost estimate using school district trades labor (volunteer).

M. Hanson, Exec. Director Portage Chamber of Commerce spoke in support of the PATHS program. Trails draw tourists and promote commerce as well as add to the quality of life. Hanson is instrumental in Columbia County Silent Sport committee which promotes trails county-wide. Hanson urged the City to support the program on behalf of both the Chamber and Columbia County Silent Sports Committee.

Halley Gilman, Marketing & Community Services Director, Divine Savior Hospital (DSH) spoke in strong support of trails/PATHS in Portage. Gilman indicated this would be a boost to the quality of life, a necessary community health issue and an important means to promote the community. DSH is a supporter of this program financially and as a member of the City. DSH hosted an annual Run/Walk for 30 years, most recently this past weekend and obtained \$8000 in commitments from area residents and businesses for the PATHS program.

Steve Sobiek, Dir. Of Business Development/Planning spoke in support of the PATHS Program as a quality of life amenity for Portage. Wisconsin is #3 in the nation in bike friendly accommodations. Sobiek spoke of the beneficial tourism impacts as well as a tool in luring (and retaining) business and residents or community growth. Lynn questioned Sobiek on ranking the priority of PATHS in relation to other ED tools. Sobiek replied that PATHS is important in that it complements other ED tools used to promote development.

Dan Kremer, Manager of Parks & Recreation, spoke in support of the PATHS program, referencing at his previous position in Ashwaubanon that trails were immensely popular. However, Kremer commented that as Parks & Recreation Manager he see other competing needs for funding to maintain existing Parks that have deteriorated. He would hate to see this further diminish funding available for parks maintenance.

Jerry M commented that the PATHS map is completed, the City should commit to funding and constructing it, even if it takes longer.

F. Galley also noted that Tourism should be looked at to assist funding. Tourism receives their funding from room tax at approximately \$100,000 annually.

Murphy reviewed staff analysis of funding options pursuant to a memo he drafted dated 7/25/14. Staff concluded that funding for construction and maintenance of the PATHS program under conventional methods is not feasible. While this program would be of immense benefit to the City an alternate, stable funding source would be necessary. Murphy noted that staff evaluated several potential funding sources and summarized a couple alternate funding sources including, Special Use District creation and Wheel Tax in combination with special assessments, donations, grants, etc. that could be considered as a stable funding source.

Dodd recognized Frank Miller who supports funding for the PATHS program. Miller noted that as the City is subject to levy limits and stagnant property growth, alternate

funding methods should be explored. Miller supports use of special use tax district to fund this important community asset. If the City does not invest in the quality of life aspects of the community, its residents and businesses will not stay. It's been started, now the City needs to insure its completion.

Mayor Tierney acknowledged the work of staff, original PATHS members, DSH, and Chamber of Commerce for their support, contributions and objective input on this process. Mayor acknowledged F. Miller's reference to the state's continual restriction of municipal revenue raising abilities. Tierney stressed that conventional funding options do not make this feasible due to the competing demands of other equally or higher priority projects. Therefore he proposed the establishment of a special use tax district to fund and maintain this program. The City needs to take advantage of this funding option as an investment in the future. Tierney believes this is a sustainable, affordable means of funding the construction and maintenance of the trail system that does not hamstring the City's ability to fund other projects and programs. Using an estimate of \$4,000,000 total budget, a special use tax would equate to \$0.87 per \$1000 of assessed valuation or approximately \$130 for a \$150,000 home.

M Hamburg acknowledged the staff's note of topographical challenges to building a trail in some areas. However, she strongly supports this proposal as an affordable means to fund this program.

Dodd noted that the Committee needs to determine their level of support to create a special use tax district and their level of support in establishing a timeline for completion. Dodd supported, and Mayor concurred that members of the PATHS group should be included in the oversight.

R Lynn moved, second by R. Maass to place on next Council meeting for determination. Lynn felt too much information needed further evaluation before rendering a decision. Maass indicated that Committee of the Whole would provide a recommendation to Council but it is not binding.

Kutzke believed that Council should have further opportunity to evaluate more information on special use tax district structure and detailed cost estimate compiled by staff.

Mayor agreed that Council needs sufficient information to make the decision but that staff needs sufficient time to develop that information. Accordingly, placing this in the next Council meeting is not enough time to develop that information. This project should not detract from the City's ability to complete their other necessary projects. Attnry Spankowski noted that to establish a special use district, public hearings, ordinance development, fee structure and legal structure need to be conducted.

R Lynn amended his motion to have Council take up consideration of this when the aforementioned information is provided by staff, Maass seconded. Motion carried unanimously on a call of the roll.

Adjourn. Motion by Charles, second by Maass to adjourn. Motion carried on a call of the roll. Meeting adjourned 9:24 p.m.,