

Pathways Committee Minutes

Thursday, August 01, 2024

10:00 am

5920 Tahoe Dr. SE

ARTICLE 1. Call to Order

Members in attendance: Supervisor Grace Lesperance, Chair Scott Rissi, Vice Chair John Driscoll, Secretary Rik Brown, Mike Reese, Kris Taylor

Absent: Jeff Coffey (excused)

Others Present: Parks and Rec Director Melanie Manion, Township Manager Jade Smith, Township Engineer Aric Thorne, Zoning Administrator (ZA) Madison Smith-Jacoby, Planning Administrative Assistant Nick Govan and others listed on the sign-in sheet.

Chair Rissi called the meeting to order at 10:00am

ARTICLE 2. Approval of Agenda

Motion was made by Secretary Rik Brown to approve the current Agenda. Supported by Member Reese. Motion carried unanimously 6 to 0.

ARTICLE 3. Public Comment (5 minutes/individual)

There was no one wishing to speak.

ARTICLE 4. Approval of June 6, 2024 Minutes

Member Reese provided a list of clarifications and changes that needed addressing.

1. Article 5.
 - a. remove the last paragraph that was repeated.
2. Article 6.
 - a. Correct spelling of “Arik” to “Aric”.

- b. Correct spelling of “milage” to "millage".
 - c. Correct spelling of McGraft to "McGraw".
 - d. Correct grammar of the last two sentences to read “Member Coffey asked if there were any other ways to make connections by using smaller paths or larger shoulders. To which Engineer Aric explained that it’s usually not best practice.” to “Member Coffey asked if there were any other ways to make connections by using smaller paths or larger shoulders, to which Engineer Aric responded that it's usually not best practice.”.
1. Article 7.
- a. Correct Member Taylor’s comment: “a community organized group” to “that a community group should be organized.”.

Motion by Member Reese to approve with the edits. Supported by Vice Chair Driscoll. Motion carried unanimously 6 to 0.

ARTICLE 5. Old Business

a) Expansion and Maintenance Plan

The committee examined the pathway expansion and maintenance plan in detail. Member Brown opened the discussion by praising the condition of the Buttrick, Ada Drive, and Cascade Rd pathways, while highlighting the deterioration of Thornapple River Drive. Following this, Engineer Aric Thorne presented maps illustrating the costs associated with current pathway maintenance and trail expansion, incorporating suggestions from the previous meeting. This provided clear information for decision-making on the budget request discussion for future projects and ongoing upkeep requirements.

Director Manion then elaborated on the financial challenges facing the planned work. She explained that while \$700,000 was available for pathway maintenance and restoration projects, the planned work required approximately \$1.2 million, leaving a significant shortfall. To address this issue, a feasibility study was proposed for all Township pathway maintenance and expansion to provide direction for future millage and budget proposals.

Chair Rissi questioned why his trail recommendations down 48th from the previous meeting were not present in Engineer Thorne's maps. Thorne responded that he made edits to the route due to cost and feasibility. In response Chair Rissi suggested an alternative pathway route connecting Rec Park, to the rest of the pathway network. He proposed going along the river to connect to the Rec Park, possibly using the ROW from the highway or railroad then connecting to the old section of Burger Drive. This proposal sparked a conversation about potential benefits and challenges, including improved recreational access to the river and engineering considerations. Engineer Thorne provided insights into the technical feasibility of this route, noting potential issues with land acquisition and right-of-way near the bridges but said it could be possible.

The discussion then moved to the topic of Laraway Lake recognizing the complexity of the Laraway Lake project, the committee proposed including its costs in addition to the broader feasibility study encompassing all township pathways. This comprehensive study would not only address the Laraway Lake segment but also provide a holistic view of the township's pathway needs. The committee unanimously agreed to prioritize the Laraway Lake pathway as their top need, emphasizing its importance in their recommendations.

After the discussion on the feasibility study for future project the discussion led the committee to discuss the Grand River Greenway project. Director Manion informed the committee that the project is slated for completion by 2026 with secured funding. She mentioned that while the county would construct the project, estimated at \$9 million, Cascade township would be required to maintain it. Director Manion explained that while the Grand River Greenway project will proceed regardless of Cascade Township's participation due to funding requirements, joining the project would make the township responsible for long-term maintenance costs. This financial obligation should be considered in the budget request. This led to a conversation about maintaining the township's high standards for the 17-miles of pathway upkeep, including snow plowing, mowing, and trimming.

After thorough discussion, the committee agreed to recommend the feasibility study for the township pathways and Laraway Lake pathway project in the budget proposal to the Board of Trustees. Township Manager Jade Smith committed to working with the finance director to determine the best allocation of funds between preventative maintenance, the feasibility study, and the Laraway Lake project. Chair Rissi clarified the priorities, stating, "The plan is for feasibility study and Laraway Lake as the main focus. Separating Laraway Lake as the number one need.

ARTICLE 6. New Business

a) Discussion of pathway rules

The committee turned its attention to pathway rules and enforcement, prompted by complaints about high-speed e-bike use. Director Manion reported instances of speeds up to 40 mph on pathways, raising significant safety concerns. She explained that the lack of a specific ordinance currently prevents enforcement of speed limits on pathways, leaving law enforcement without the necessary tools to address the issue.

The discussion evolved to consider the challenges of regulating specific e-bike classes, given the rapid pace of technological development in the field. As an alternative, the committee explored the idea of implementing a general speed limit for all pathway users. They reviewed speed limits ranging from 10-20 mph, noting that other communities typically recommend 10-15 mph for multi-use paths.

Supervisor Lesperance suggested a 19-mph speed limit for the pathways. Secretary Brown supported this unconventional speed limit, citing personal experience of seeing a 17-mph limit in another community that effectively drew attention and encouraged compliance. After deliberation, the committee agreed to propose a 19-mph speed limit for the pathways. This decision aimed to balance safety concerns with the practical needs of pathway users, including e-bike riders.

The committee also recognized the importance of regional coordination on pathway rules. They discussed plans to meet with Ada Township to align regulations between

their interconnected pathway systems. Furthermore, Director Manion mentioned ongoing discussions with the West Michigan Trails Association about coordinating efforts on a broader regional scale.

To support the implementation of new rules, the committee emphasized the need for comprehensive community education. They proposed utilizing newsletters, social media, and updated signage to inform residents about pathway etiquette and any new speed regulations. The committee also discussed the role of law enforcement in educating users and enforcing the proposed rules.

ARTICLE 7. Other Business

Member Taylor raised a question about repairs to cracks in the pathway, following up on a discussion from the previous meeting. Engineer Thorne acknowledged the issue and informed the committee it would be added to the list for crack sealing in the near future, addressing the maintenance concern.

Chair Reese inquired about the start date for the Cascade Road bridge project, seeking an update on its progress. Engineer Thorne and Manager Smith responded that a meeting was scheduled for the following Friday to discuss the project timeline with the contractors on the project.

ARTICLE 8. Adjournment

Member Taylor motioned to adjourn the meeting at 10:54AM, seconded by Member Reese.

Motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 10:54AM

Respectfully submitted,
Rik Brown, Secretary