

Greenway officials discuss trails, recreation in Niagara County

BY TERRY DUFFY

Editor-in-Chief

Members of the Niagara River Greenway Commission held a lengthy get-together Tuesday afternoon in the Town of Porter. The two-part session included a business meeting that saw discussions on a fitness court in planning for Porter on the Lake Town Park; discussions on Greenway projects such as the Gorge View Trail Systems; and a breakthrough Environmental Ambassador Project utilizing high school students, area colleges and businesses.

The session concluded with an overview of a number of projects submitted by government and private interests over past months that are now under consideration by Greenway committees in Erie and Niagara counties.

Porter Supervisor John "Duffy" Johnston led off the business session, where he discussed the town's latest efforts toward creating a nature/exercise trail at Porter on the Lake Park on Dietz Road. He said the 33-acre park, acquired in the early-2000s from private interests, continues to evolve into one of the finest recreational public areas in Niagara County. Improvements completed thus far include a horizontal ladder and wood bridge found in the southern portion of POTL; a new entrance sign to the nature trail; and a 12-vehicle parking area at the end of Dietz Road by the lake. Waterfront and trails benches are also in the works in a wrap-around trails area with planning underway for push-up and pull-up bars, also in the park's southern area.

Johnston called Porter on the Lake, with its 330 feet of lakefront, a "crown jewel" in northern Niagara. He went on to review the town's latest plan – that of a new fitness court promoted by the National Fitness Campaign.

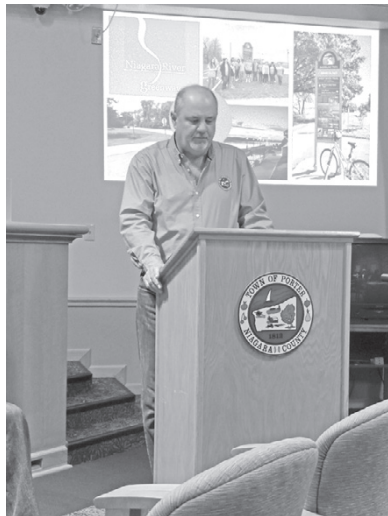
According to its website (<https://nationalfitnesscampaign.com/fitnesscourt>) "The Fitness Court brings world-class outdoor fitness free to cities across America. Featuring 7 functional training zones, thousands of bodyweight exercises and digital programming for adults of all ages and abilities, the Fitness Court is redefining outdoor fitness in communities across the nation."

Johnston said, "This is an outdoor fitness court. Hopefully, in the springtime, it's going to be beautiful; the closest one is Rochester. Hopefully, the schools and colleges, soccer teams, baseball teams come down and use this. It's all dynamic tension. It's just an amazing thing."

Johnston said he has also been working with the Greenway Commission to link a bike trail from nearby Four Mile Creek State Park on the west to POTL.

"We were in meetings with Four Mile Creek (on this)," he said. "The Town of Porter went down and removed some trees, so that bikers can come down and ride over to Porter on the Lake and have them use our park. It's 33 acres, about 330 feet of frontage, it's just beautiful."

Johnston said the town also widened the park's Dietz Road



Porter Supervisor "Duffy" Johnston discusses a new fitness court at Porter on the Lake. Also shown is an image provided by the National Fitness Campaign.

top ... to the Town of Lewiston, and we have arrived in Porter. Now we have a place (to extend this).

"This is emerging as an actual plan. ... The \$30 million that Kathy Hochul has initially committed to trail development has driving funding in other areas."

He spoke of Greenway's work with the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation in developing the former LaSalle Park (now Centennial Park) on Buffalo's waterfront and a developing trail in East Buffalo.

"The money is there to make it happen in the Scajaquada Trail. ... A lot more is happening than we anticipated. We're going to see a lot more bicycle experiences coming to our region than ever before," Stevens said.

Further news from the session involved Greenway's visions for 2023. Included is an Environmental Ambassador Project utilizing Erie County-area high schools and colleges, businesses and environmental groups. Funding for the program's debut came from settlements related to the Tonawanda Coke lawsuits. The initiative involves students and focus groups from select ZIP codes utilizing what officials called "a mini Greenway grant" with a focus on environmental science programs and ways on improving the area's environment.

A Greenway speaker said that, due to funding, organizers had limited the program's initial involvement to Erie County participants. They said Niagara County could be a part of similar programs in the future.

The leadoff symposium will be taking place Feb. 9 at Linde Inc. Tonawanda.

Greenway member Sean Edwards of Lewiston was among those who voiced strong interest in extending this venture into Niagara County in the future. He spoke of the county's representation on Greenway, and Niagara Wheatfield School District's

strong involvement in environmental issues. Edwards suggested Greenway strongly consider a partnership with other Niagara County districts such as Lewiston-Porter, Niagara Falls and others in making this happen.

Stevens agreed, calling Niagara Wheatfield "the most active participant" on environmental areas. He said Lew-Port, Niagara Falls and others should most definitely be considered for future programs, if funding is available.

Other areas Greenway said it plans to work on were habitat improvement work on Grand Island; ecological restoration efforts along the river corridor;

and wellness recreation, including Niagara Falls bicycle master plan.

The meeting wrapped up with discussions on a number of projects in Erie and Niagara, including the Sanborn Museum schoolhouse project in Lewiston, and the Isle View enhancement project in the Tonawandas.

The Greenway Commission's Host Committee will meet in coming days to review these further.

Fore more on the Niagara River Greenway Commission, visit www.niagararivergreenway.com.

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