

Communities embrace Northern Niagara Regional Trail Network

MOU signifies 'shared vision' for regional bike trail system

BY TERRY DUFFY

Editor-in-Chief

Niagara County municipal leaders laid the foundation last Friday for what is envisioned to be a 35-mile-long Niagara County bike trail system connecting the Village of Lewiston on the south to lake communities on the north and Lockport on the east.

"This memo of understanding forms the foundation and collaboration necessary to successfully advance our shared vision for a regional bike trail to connect all of our communities," Village of Wilson Mayor Art Lawson said Friday in announcing the Northern Niagara Regional Network partnership. "This memorandum of understanding focuses on building a healthy lifestyle, to build and develop a regional effort to improve our communities. Easily put, Niagara County is blessed to have the leaders that we have."

The network includes the Village and Town of Lewiston, Village of Youngstown, Town of Porter, City and Town of Lockport, Village and Town of Wilson, and the towns of Newfane and Baker. The MOU ties all communities into a shared vision of connecting existing trails and access routes into significant multiuse trails into a network that includes the Ontario Shoreline Trail in Canada, the Erie Canal-way system and the recently completed Empire State Trail.

While its actual funding remains uncertain, NNRTN officials said the MOU sets the stage for an even greater collaboration to make the county trails system an ultimate reality.

"This is much more than a town or a village trail. The reason why this is so significant is that we are connecting Empire State's new trails system to the northern Niagara Region," Niagara River Greenway Director Greg Stevens said. "This is exactly the kind of development that New York state is looking for."

He noted federal funding for such



Municipal leaders of the Northern Niagara Regional Trail Network gather for a group photo.

Northern Niagara Regional Trail Network Collaborative Overview

Participants: Town of Lewiston, Village of Lewiston, Village of Youngstown, Town of Porter, Village of Wilson, Town of Wilson, Town of Newfane, Town of Somerset, Village of Barker, City of Lockport and Town of Lockport, plus Niagara River Greenway Commission, Buffalo Waterkeeper, New York Department of State, Old Fort Niagara, Local Chambers of Commerce and New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Problem Definition: Communities such as Pendleton, the Town of Lockport and the City of Lockport are benefitting from regional trail network connections that are being made throughout Western New York, including projects related to the Empire State Trail and other local trails. In order to continue to strengthen the regional connectivity for the entire system and also ensure that additional Niagara County communities are benefitting from the regional trail system, this collaborative of northern Niagara County communities is working together to envision a Northern Niagara County Regional Trail Network.

Each municipality has needs to fund programs and grant ideas that would work well when they connect to each municipality. There is a need to work together to make the Niagara River, Lake Ontario and Erie Canal region stronger and more connected through the Western New York Greenway hub of the Empire State.

Vision: To support and empower a subregional development initiative that moves forward each community's interconnectivity to one another and also the existing regional trail network. The municipalities will work together to ensure that seamless, cohesive energies and efforts foster a stronger and healthier community wealth.

Objectives: This MOU forms a foundation for coordination and collaboration necessary to successfully advance a shared vision. Mutual efforts may be used to purposely demonstrate – when seeking funding for specific waterfront and multiuse trail projects – the highest standards of public interests are ensured.

Impacts of working together: When the municipalities work together, it demonstrates a stronger regional presence and cohesive effort that will allow members to move forward and strengthen funding applications that maximize the benefit of the businesses and residents.

a venture is already gaining support from the new Biden administration.

"People have realized with COVID how important park space and trails are. Continuing to invest in this sort of infrastructure is something which appears to be a very high probability," Stevens said.

"As people scurry around to see which communities are ready to receive this funding ... there are significant elements of this that we can quickly implement" to make the envisioned trails system to be

shovel ready.

"We want to be ready for a long-term development project, which would take a decade. But there are significant pieces of this that can happen quite quickly."

Steven said the governor's office expects to complete much of its 750-mile Empire State trail system running from Manhattan to Montreal and out to Western New York by the end of this year. "It's 750 miles of safe, off-road cycling. To the families and foreign visitors, it's the longest connected continuous off-road trails system in the country."

"That is a huge tourism draw," Stevens said of the envisioned Niag-

ara trail. He forecast upward of 8.6 million people would be able to annually utilize the trails system once it's completed.

"We connected Manhattan to Montreal, Albany to Buffalo," he noted. "And then our Greenway Trail along the Niagara River connects everyone to Canada, and the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls. So when you look at Western New York, we have the Genesee Valley Greenway Trails comes all the way up to Rochester. We have on the drawing board the Southern Tier Trails, which is a rail route which can very quickly be converted to a trail. (Combined with) the Empire

State Trail, which is completed to the Outer Harbor. This represents a very interesting trail network, which connects communities at the western end of the trail."

Stevens said the governor's office envisions phase II to the Empire State Trail, with the Western New York segment to tie further into Canada on its northern ends and serve as a gateway to the west in the Southern Tier.

"In Niagara County ... this is prime real estate, this is waterfront. These are quaint and attractive towns and villages. It would be shame not to have that area connected to this fantastic network," he said.

Stevens the state has been working with officials from Lewiston, Porter and Youngstown, as well as New York State Parks, "to develop a new trail system for the future of the lower Niagara Region."

Discussing the future trails envisioned from the southeast corner in the Village of Lewiston to Fort Niagara, he said, "This (is) what a really attractive network would be over time. In each of the villages (Lewiston and Youngstown and Wilson) we'll have a village loop to make sure all the attractions ... are readily accessible to visiting tourists and cyclists. That (lends) to the economic development potential of places along the way."

"This could be a real economic variable to some of these smaller communities."

Stevens said the signing of the MOU links the communities' commitment and cooperation. While he said some pieces of rail lines in northern Niagara connecting communities still remain to be linked into the plan – and, again, financing to acquire them is yet to be determined – "It is clearly a high priority and feasible connection. ... These are opportunities to put low-cost trails systems into place."

"We have the beginnings of the plan; there is much design and engineering work to be done, but we want to make sure this plan shows up in the statewide greenways plan."

He invited the Niagara County Legislature to join in endorsing the NNRTN: "As important as your trail system is to you, it's even more important that what it connects to. It's part of something bigger that makes everything we do all the more worthwhile," he said.

Porter Supervisor John "Duffy" Johnston said, "The bike trail will connect our municipalities in a different way as never seen before. ... It is great to be part of a group that will design a safe way for this bike trail that will bring more people to Old Fort Niagara, Youngstown and our state parks in Porter."

Village of Lewiston Mayor Anne Welch said, "I'm very excited to work on this whole project with all my other community friends and Greg Stevens and his staff. It's a great project to connect all the communities together, and I'm looking forward to finishing it."

"It will bring a lot of people into our communities; I've very pleased that we have this project."

First District Niagara County Legislator Irene Myers said, "I'm excited about being a part of it, and excited that it's coming into our community. It will give us a nice little boost; people will discover what we have down here in our own little jewel – our neck of the woods."

LEWISTON-PORTER CHURCH DIRECTORY

Lutheran Church of the Messiah

915 Oneida Street, Lewiston
Phone: 754-4944 Fax: 754-0903
www.messiahlewisston.org

The Reverend Ashlin Marchese, Pastor
The Reverend Thomas R. Mason, Pastor Emeritus

Online worship can be viewed at MessiahLewiston.org
Come worship with us Sundays at 9:00am

SHARE YOUR MESSAGE CALL US AT 773-7676

A school with small class sizes and big results...



Preschool, Kindergarten - Gr 8
OPEN HOUSE

Virtual or In Person
Tuesday, March 16th
6:00 - 7:30pm


Come Meet Our Teachers & See Why Parents Are Choosing Holy Ghost

Offering in person instruction
5 DAYS PER WEEK


Scan the QR Code
to register for
OPEN HOUSE



Holy Ghost Lutheran School - (716) 731-3030
6630 Luther St., Wheatfield, NY 14304
Conveniently located on Niagara Rd. in Wheatfield
www.holyghostlcms.org



10 10
Happy Double Digits
To Our Beautiful Girl
Kirsten Elizabeth
10 Nelson!
Love, Mom, Dad
and your 10
Brothers and Sister



"Lori & Friends"



Encore show with
Alessandra Santarosa
"Peace Corps Experience"

hosted by Lori Caso

LCTV Channel 1301
March 1st - 14th
Mon 3am, 10am, 3pm • Wed 4am, 4pm, 10pm
Thur 3am, 10pm • Fri 10:30am
Sat 3:30am, 5:30pm • Sun 11:30am, 10pm



THE GRANITE SHOP
402-1046

A Milestone Video Production. Made possible by funds from...

NIAGARA FRONTIER PUBLICATIONS
SENTINEL • TRIBUNE
DISPATCH • PENNSYLVANIA
wnypapers.com

TOPS
Friendly Markets
906 CENTER ST., LEWISTON

Shine Studio
Ask for Toni
297-0181