Fox River Corridor Plan Open House
(Burtons Bridge at Route 176 to Johnsburg at North Chapel Hill Road)
Virtual Meeting via Zoom
Tuesday, November 10, 2020
2:00-3:00pm

MEETING SUMMARY

I. Introductions
Kelsey Pudlock (CMAP) welcomed meeting attendees and thanked everyone for coming. Renee Hanlon (McHenry County Department of Planning and Development) and Cody Sherriff (City of McHenry) introduced themselves and gave a brief overview of the planning project. Kelsey then provided instructions for the topical break out room group discussions. In total, there were four topical breakout rooms. Each participant had the opportunity to join two rooms for a group discussion on a specific topic.

II. Group discussions (1st break out room)
The following are summaries of the discussions that were had in the first set of breakout rooms across the four topic areas:

Economic Development
Participants expressed interest in more events and creative uses of the river, particularly during the non-boating season, to help generate economic activity year-round. Some suggested more events like McHenry’s Venice boat night and a winter carnival, as well as ice fishing and cross-county skiing activities, that could take place in Moraine Hills State Park and golf courses (in the winter). Others suggested that communities within the corridor could coordinate with communities to the north to help bring attractions downriver.

Participants were also interested in attracting more people to existing businesses throughout the corridor. They suggested that events and businesses that are outdoor-oriented and family-friendly (including dog-friendly), could help attract more people. Participants also expressed interest in more commercial activity in areas where it is minimal. Specifically, there is a desire for more businesses and restaurants on the north and south ends of the corridor. However, participants recognized that commercial space along the river is limited and it is risky to run a business on the river given the frequency and severity of flooding in the area. If development were to occur along the river, participants pointed out there are opportunities to promote environmentally friendly development. They also pointed out that communities should evaluate and consider changing existing zoning to make the area more viable to a greater diversity of businesses.
Parks and Recreation
Participants identified that the Corridor has a number of existing assets ranging from the boating opportunities on the water to the restaurants and Riverwalk within McHenry’s downtown. Although these assets benefit the Corridor, participants indicated that river safety was a major concern for river users, and as a result were cautious about promoting recreation in fear of exacerbating existing safety issues. Participants mentioned that there are a lot of motorized boaters (ranging in all experience levels) that do not follow boating guidelines and regulations. To promote safety, participants suggested having some form of security presence at access points such as marinas, as well as educational requirements, particularly for those getting on the water through rental services that are emerging within the Corridor.

Improving existing access was also echoed by participants. They identified that many piers and marinas could be improved upon for both boaters and pedestrians. On a similar note, participants pointed out that tributaries get backed up with sediment overtime, which is a long-term maintenance issue. Additionally, participants expressed that they are appreciative of McHenry’s efforts to revive the downtown and would like to see their investments continue. A couple of locations that participants felt were ripe for redevelopment were a vacant lot next to the restaurant, DC Cobbs, as well as the old wastewater treatment plant site. Participants noted that the treatment plant site is for sale and considered it as an opportunity for the City to provide more public boat access.

Environmental Quality
Participants noted that invasive species were an issue throughout the study area, especially in disturbed areas and along roadways. Phragmites, hybrid cattail species, and buckthorn were all mentioned as species of concern. Areawide coordination (e.g., at the watershed and county scales) and plans for continuity of maintenance were raised as important factors for successful invasive species management. IDNR staff in the room mentioned that they are lacking sufficient staff, volunteers, and funding. Several ideas around education were also raised, including education and incentives for private landowners who use native vegetation to help manage stormwater.

Transportation
Participants said they wanted to see increased trail connections to the Prairie Trail, which runs west of the study area. Some would also like to see Prairie Trail connections that bring bike access through the downtown to the river. Better wayfinding to the Prairie Trail and local transit is desired as well. Some participants noted that transit ridership may not rebound after the pandemic, and in response, indicated there could be an opportunity to re-purpose parking lots while ridership is low. One person suggested
that the parking lot next to the McHenry Station could be reimagined as a place for brick and mortar retailer shops.

III. **Group discussion (2nd break out room)**

The following are summaries of the discussions that were had in the second set of breakout rooms across the four topic areas:

**Economic Development**

This breakout room discussed how flooding impacts businesses in the area, yet the river still remains an important asset with some remaining untapped potential. Flooding and high water is a major concern for businesses as well as boaters and will likely continue to be an issue in the face of climate change. Even so, there is an opportunity for new development at the lagoon near the intersection of Chapel Hill Road and River Road. Other interests and opportunities discussed to draw people off the river included the need for downtown development plan to be further implemented, extending the Riverwalk, and encouraging businesses to provide more outside dining and attractions.

**Parks and Recreation**

Participants voiced that the Corridor’s parks and open spaces are significant assets that have the potential to support a wider range of recreational activities. One stakeholder indicated that the McHenry Dam and Moraine Hills State Parks would be great locations for interpretive nature centers. Participants suggested that an interpretive center could help support existing and new outdoor programming as well as serve as an educational tool for the Corridor. Some stakeholders also voiced their interest in greater access on the river for activities such as canoeing and fishing, more open space and greenway connections, as well as events in parks and public spaces.

Boating and biking were also touched on in this breakout room. Participants expressed interest in the preservation of boating on the river and acknowledged the need to ensure that boating is safe for everyone. With regard to biking throughout the corridor, participants indicated that bikers could benefit from improved access to the downtown and nearby trails (such as the Prairie Trail) as well as infrastructure that makes visiting areas like the downtown or nearby open spaces via bike more attractive and safe. Infrastructure amenities suggested included bike racks, dedicated bike lanes, and rumble strips on state route roads.
Environmental Quality
In this breakout room, concerns were raised about the role that wake boarding and wake surfing play in shoreline erosion below the McHenry Dam. Sediment buildup was confirmed as a significant issue, and the issue of heavy metals in sediment was also raised. Improved stormwater management and water quality protection were brought up as important issues. A representative of the Fox Waterway Agency advisory committee mentioned that the FWA spends most of its time and resources on dredging and conducting debris removal post-flooding, and wishes they could move beyond that and add water quality aspects to their work. Regarding flooding, some mentioned that current levels of FEMA funding were insufficient for riverside homeowners who wanted to elevate their homes to deal with flooding.

Transportation
Participants in the second breakout group also expressed interest in stronger bike trail connections. When discussing increased access to the Fox River, a few residents said that river safety needs to be a priority if the county is planning to create more access points. One person suggested that all boat users (motor and paddle) be tested on river rules and regulations before getting the required permit. In regard to transit, none of the participants were regular users however, they all suspected that ridership would be low given the pandemic. In order to attract tourists to the river, one participant suggested looking into duck vehicles that could take visitors from the Metra station onto the river!

IV. Questions from participants
Participants did not ask any questions during the meeting.

V. Next Steps
Kelsey concluded the meeting and reminded participants that the online surveys on the project’s website would be closing on November 27. She also noted that meeting summaries would be posted and indicated that the next public meetings would be visioning workshops that will likely take place around the start of the new year.
Environmental Quality

- Invasive species management: coordinator for invasive species management, plan throughout area, removing and then restoring.

- Opportunity: collaboration with Johnsburg to high on invasive species, restoration.

- Stakeholder Coordination: need continuity to ensure that restored areas will be maintained.

- DNRE short staffed any resources would be helpful. Funding, volunteer support, additional contractual services for natural areas mgmt. Recruiting is hard. MCD has more capacity for volunteer coordination. Brad Semel resting.

Other Ideas

- General interest in increasing open space and restoration.

- Opportunity: education and incentives for private landowners about native plantings, stormwater management, etc. i.e. Minnesota program for pollinators.
Parks and Recreation

- **Marinas**
- **Public Access Sites**
- **Portage sites**

**Nature Trails**
- **Equestrian**
- **Hiking**

**Regional Greenways & Trails**
- **Existing**
- **Planned**
- **Programmed**

- **Fox River Corridor**
- **Municipal Limits**
- **County Boundary**
- **Water**
- **Open Space**
- **Golf courses**
- **Metra Line (UP-NW)**
- **Metra Station**

**Sources:** Regional Greenways and Trails Plan (CMAP, 2016), Nature Matters (ACCD, 2016)

---

**Safety:** ensure boating is safe for everyone

**Opportunity:** more events and greenway connections; when opportunity arises, obtain more green space

**Biking Amenities:** biking access needed between prairie trial and downtowns; need of adequate bike parking; when in downtown creating pedestrian area that attracts peds/bikers/visitors

**Opportunity:** increase ability to get businesses on the river in the area; water can get choppy and can prevent/hurt businesses in the area; if no wake was imposed to that area

**Safety:** new highway improvements include rumble strips

**Opportunity:** create an interpretive center; nature center at the dam state park

**Existing Asset:** McHenry Dam visitation has increased significantly -- help understand watershed better; bike paths -- just highlighting existing access

**Existing Asset:** Volo Bog, Moraine Hills and McHenry Dam State Park -- programming and birdwatching

**Access:** more access to the river

**Other:** residents of Johnsburg, Crystal Lake -- use the upper river and lakes; travel to lower river a couple times a year as well -- enjoy boating and keep that environment running and safe

**Other activities:** snowmobiling and other activities in the Johnsburg and McHenry area

**Other:** naturalization of the shoreline can help with water/wave action; invasives at bay

**Access:** accessible to boats and kayaks -- does make it dangerous on weekends, anything that could be done about that; keep boating
Other Ideas

- Riverwalk, along Pearl running North from there.
- Prairie Trail – bike access through downtown to river would be great
- Wayfinding signage to connect people on and off trail
- Identify transit opportunities – downtown wayfinding for transit
- County is doing work on Chapel Hill Road
- Bikeshare April 2021 – McHenry is a good location, between downtown but adjacent to Prairie Trail
- Transit ridership – not expecting to rebound so thinking about how to utilize parking station – shuffle around the Metra parking, bring in retailers
- PACE is not reducing service in McHenry County, keep 806, 807, 808 and blend it in
- New off-street bike path goes from the entrance of Moraine Hills State Park east to Lily Lake Road
Other Ideas

- Improved bike paths – linking to the Prairie Trail
- Neighborhood connection to Prairie Trail
- Best way along McCullom lake Road or along the train station, through residential
- Downtown McHenry – Boone Creek Point – nice access point
- Gravitate away from this section of the Fox River
- Safety needs to be the number one priority when it comes to access and more parks – safety concerns, make sure people know the rules of the lake
- Seasonal trolleys to connect train stations to waterways
- Duck trolley from Fox Lake train station to McHenry riverfront, big space where you can have parking