

Conceptual Center Street bike trail draws mixed reviews



Shown at left is what this section of Center Street looks like today. Pictured above is an artist's rendering of the conceptual bike path plan. (Graphic by Alta, courtesy of the Niagara River Greenway Commission)

BY JOSHUA MALONI
GM/Managing Editor

A new Center Street bike trail proposal from Niagara River Greenway Commission Executive Director Greg Stevens and Village of Lewiston Mayor Anne Welch was not an instant hit with the crowd attending Tuesday's municipal work session.

Stevens and Welch explained the New York State Department of Transportation will repave Center Street in 2021. As part of that project – which Stevens said is funded, despite New York's COVID-19-related economic shortfalls – an opportunity exists to add two bike paths along the south side of Center Street.

A conceptual drawing shows the two-way bike paths nestled in between green space and a buffer abutting new parking spaces. The remainder of the roadway would be narrowed, but all existing lanes would remain.

"We're trying to come up with a long-term plan for looking at everything from the Village of Lewiston north to Lake Ontario, and think about what the future recreational infrastructure – trails, connected parks, green spaces, conservation areas – which is what the Greenway does, working with our parks department. What would the communities like that to look like? What's the best connection?" Stevens said.

He noted, "From Devil's Hole, you're connecting to the whole renewed Robert Moses Parkway, and the Empire State Trail, which goes all the way to Manhattan and Montreal. So, we have arriving in Lewiston by next spring the longest continuous off-road trail network in the country.

"It's a big deal, and people are going to come from all over the world to ride that trail system, which right now ends in the village. So, we're trying to plan ahead to what does it look like with significantly more cycling traffic. What does it look like when tourists are coming by bicycle instead of by car? And how does the village participate in that? And what infrastructure do we need to plan ahead for, to host what we hope is a significantly increased volume in active recreation, which is what all New York state tourism is now behind and promoting.

"So, all the indications we have

is that this is going to be quite popular. And that Lewiston is going to be, obviously, a very exciting place to be."

Feedback Poses Questions

Planning Board member Tasia Fitzpatrick said, "I'm not sure the businesses are in favor, and I think, as a community, we want to hear specifically from the Lewiston businesses, from the chamber."

She expressed concern about upkeep of the new islands next to the bike lane, and speculated the parking spaces aren't large enough for trucks – let alone cars with open doors.

"I really think we should wait to hear (from) all the businesses – what they come back with. I think they'll give you some good feedback on that."

She later added, "I just think there's huge safety issues."

Tom Deal of Deal Realty said, "I'm not so sure; I'd like to get a better feel for (the proposal), because I am a business owner and I cannot agree with what (is said here) anymore. I mean, the two biggest issues on Center Street are safety and parking, and this new plan hurts both of those. Plus, it hurts the festivals. I mean, I don't see any reason why we will be sending bicycles down Center Street and reducing it. ... We're making it worse."

Welch said bikers won't be allowed to use the lanes when there is a festival or event closing Center Street to vehicular traffic.

Paul Luzzi said he is a bicyclist and, "I have to agree with Tom."

"I ride my bike. And I don't agree with the bike path on Cen-

ter Street, and I'll tell you why. ... There's not enough room.

"And what do we want to do with the bicyclists when they get to Lewiston? We want them to spend money. They're not going to ride Center Street and stop in the middle of Center Street. I think the way we should be thinking is destinations. These bicyclists want to come to Lewiston, park their bikes at Academy Park, walk up and down Center Street. Maybe we should be thinking about an alternative route to get to Center Street – to get to the center of the village and get down to the waterfront – and ask ourselves the destinations these people are going to want to go to."

Kiwanis Club of Lewiston Past President Marty Pauly asked, "Are you allowing for places for people to park their bikes along this path? Or is the idea if they want to shop on Center, they'd have to park at one end and walk or bike to the other end? Is there going to be room for bike racks," if people want to, for example, bike down and stop at Apple Granny's for a bite to eat?

Stevens said, "We have not designed that detail, but that would

certainly be appropriate."

He said there will be a "significant gateway, destination, bike racks, information, bathroom stops, fill your water bottle – things that cyclists do when they get somewhere. But you would also want to have them be able to park their bikes periodically along the way," to get a coffee or shop.

Deal said Lewiston's biking season would be less than half of what's possible in cities with warmer climates – "It's not 12 months. It might be four, five months; I don't know – depending on how brave you are, I guess.

"It just seems like a lot of commitment, and a lot more to take care of, that we don't have the money to do."

Here's the Pitch

Stevens said Lewiston could be "sort of the nexus, the epicenter, the hub of all this activity we're anticipating."

In holding meetings with local stakeholders, Stevens said he's heard, "We love our gardens. We've got a very active Garden Club. There's a lot of beautiful flowers and little, mini pocket parks. Can we do more with that?"

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Build on that theme?"

He added, "The Arts Council has come to our previous meetings here and talked about, 'We're an arts community. We want more public art,' and a trail is a wonderful way to have more public art.

"We've heard that we want fewer signs. There's the De-Sign Lewiston concept, which is a wonderful idea and, actually, when you think about it, could you have, instead of having manmade signs, could you have art and flowers, which

SEE LEWISTON, on Page 18

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