

Greenway panel backs 8-mile trail on Grand Island

Some residents voice strong opposition

By Thomas Prohaska / News Niagara Reporter / [@ThomasProhaska](#) / [Google+](#)
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Although half a dozen Grand Island residents voiced strong opposition to the project, the Niagara River Greenway Commission decided Tuesday that a planned eight-mile trail connecting two state parks is consistent with the goals of the Greenway plan.

"This project is part of our master plan," commission Chairman Gregory Stevens said. "It's not our place to design the details of your project."

Speakers during the public comment period in the Beaver Island State Park clubhouse said the West River Connector Trail would be of doubtful use, would harm the property values of nearby homes and probably wouldn't be maintained, given what several speakers said is the state's poor track record on mowing along West River Parkway.

"It looks so (lousy)," resident Rosemary Ryan said. "We won't even be able to see the trail because of all the grass that will grow up."

"If it wasn't for the homeowners, the grass wouldn't get cut," said Raymond Nuchereneno, one of those who does so. He was concerned that the bike trail would become "a drag strip" for snowmobiles in the winter.

"If you're a true biker, you wouldn't use a trail, anyway," Liz Lutnick, of Grand Island, said. "Just because you have money doesn't mean you should spend it on things that aren't going to be used to the fullest extent."

Lutnick said the town would be better advised to repair the potholes on the shoulders of roads such as East River Parkway if it wants to improve bicycling conditions.

The project, estimated to cost \$2.27 million, would connect Beaver Island and Buckhorn Island state parks.

The state will bear the construction cost for what Town Supervisor Mary Cooke called "the first project in the history of the Greenway jointly sponsored by the state and a municipality."

Cooke said the trail, to be built on state land between West River Parkway and the river, also would provide connections to Big Six Mile Creek Marina and the town's Nike Base Park.

"It's close enough to experience the river, rather than seeing it from afar," Cooke said.

Stevens told the audience that public concerns will be addressed in the environmental review process before any funding is granted by one of the standing committees that actually controls Greenway purse strings.

The commission has come under fire in the past for backing projects that were not seen as improving parks and access to the river. That was not the case with the projects discussed at Tuesday's meeting.

Three other projects were deemed consistent with Greenway goals:

- The Buffalo Lighthouse Association is seeking \$825,000 to restore the South Buffalo Lighthouse, located at the southern end of Buffalo Harbor, on the Stony Point Breakwater.

The 43-foot cast iron lighthouse, built in 1903, would be a "bookend" to the 1833 lighthouse at the northern end of the harbor, association President Michael N. Vogel said.

- The Niagara River Yacht Club of North Tonawanda is asking for \$192,200 to install riprap to protect 300 feet of riverfront at its River Road property from erosion. Invasive vegetation would be removed and replaced with native species, said John M. Priesler, a board member of the club.

Also, a 15-by-40-foot area on club grounds would become a rest area with picnic benches for walkers and bikers.

- The Town of Newfane is requesting \$118,460 for improvements at Olcott Beach on Lake Ontario, including repairs to a crumbling concrete pier east of the beach and repairs to the beach wall, which used to be part of the foundation of the long-gone Olcott Beach Hotel.

The Host Communities Standing Committee, which governs Greenway funding in Niagara County, will meet next Tuesday to vote on Newfane's request.

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