

Turtleback Trails Network
 Steering Committee Meeting via TEAMS
 April 20, 2021
 “Group Memory”

Participants: John Masterson, Kim Skinner, OJ Hechler, Hannah Schechter (BOR), Maggie Fowler (BOR), Alana Holland (BOR intern), Cassidy Steckbeck (BOR intern), Attila Bality

ACTION ITEMS

WHAT	WHO	BY WHEN
Talking Points for Mtg with City Manager	OJ, John, Merry Jo, Attila	May 7
Set Up Mtg with City Manager	OJ	May 7
Publicize Trail Race on County & State Tourism social media	John, Kim	May 30
Present Project Update to City Commission, Village Trustees	John, Merry Jo, OJ, Attila	May 19
Establish focus group for WBurg footbridge discussions	John	May 15
Establish committee for new project publication	Gina, Kim, John, Merry Jo	April 30
Contact local graphic designer “Mo” about interest in supporting project	John	done
Identify LA firms and costs for Rotary Park design workshop	Attila	May 7

Meeting Agenda:

- I. Riverwalk Project vs Turtleback Trails Network Project (30 min)
Desired outcome: Agreement on how to proceed for the benefit of the local community
- II. Working Group Updates (10 min)
Desired outcomes: An understanding of the work being accomplished by the Trails, Conservation & Education, and River Access working groups
- III. Communication and community engagement (20 min)
Desired Outcomes: Agree on path forward to engage local community residents
- IV. Rotary Park Design Charrette (20 min)
Desired Outcome: Discussion on benefits of organizing a design charrette for Rotary Park building off the Healing Water Trail concept drawings.
- V. Next Steps (10min)

Riverwalk vs Turtleback Trails Network

- The Riverwalk Project seeks to study the economic feasibility of developing the riverside corridor through an Economic Development grant award. It’s being lead by Wilson & Company and the Turtleback Trails Network (TTN) project is focusing on recreation and conservation of the Rio Grande corridor as a means to economic development and tourism.

- The Turtleback Trails Network project was initiated prior to the Riverwalk project. City Commission and Williamsburg Village Trustees supported the TTN project through resolutions.
- There is commonality among the two projects in that both address economic development for the community. The approaches are different though. The TTN project looks at trails and access to public lands as the primary goal, whereas the Riverwalk project explores commercial development of undeveloped lands along the Rio Grande corridor.
- We need to find a way for the two projects to collaborate closer. It's not in the best interest of either project to present to different ideas to City/Village residents and allow leaders to make decisions. We should not further confuse residents. How are residents supposed to understand similarities/differences between our projects
- Do we collapse steering committees into one? Do we terminate one of the projects? Is there a decision maker to help everyone move forward? Can the City Manager help us navigate how to move forward?
- One methodology is to pursue a single project with an Alternatives Approach – Alternative A is “do nothing, Alternative B is “conservation and recreation,” Alternative C is “corridor development”. Depending on community interest and direction could determine if the TTN goals & strategies or the Riverwalk project goals and strategies are pursued.
- It's important to understand the TTN project is much larger in scope. It extends from the Fish Hatchery to Williamsburg, it brings the Rio Grande Trail into focus for our community. Scrapping the TTN project doesn't make sense since we have broader goals in mind. The confusion is around only one segment of the project study area – Ralph Edwards to Rotary Park!
- Neal Brown has plans to improve Fish Hatchery site and connections to Rio Grande Trail within Elephant Butte Park. He is aware of the TTN river access efforts and is communicating with working group members.
- We could get on TorC May 19th meeting agenda to help clarify the project scope and goals. Maybe we could work with Mr. Swingle prior to the May 19th meeting. Mr. Swingle is aware of our work. It's recommended we meet with him as soon as he comes on board. Meeting with Mr. Swingle should include Kim, John, Merry Jo and Attila if possible. We want to clarify projects and where they align and where they differ. NPS has reached out to Wilson & Co to figure out ways to align efforts. Information about Rio Grande Trail also provided to Wilson & Co. planner, who didn't have knowledge about Rio Grande Trail.
- **ACTION** is prepare talking points for meeting. OJ can take lead on setting up the meeting. We need to wait until after budget meetings to approach City Manager.
 - We support both steering committees
 - Recognize mutual goals and how to collaborate

Working Groups Reports

Footbridges & Trails

- Need to increase participants in working group.
- The two potential alignments for the Rio Grande Trail, downstream of the Forstner property were evaluated using the Rio Grande Trail evaluation criteria. Preliminary results indicate the lower bench route is preferred consistent with visitor experience and more universally accessible.
- The NPS has connected with the BLM Las Cruces office outdoor recreation planner. We'll need to orient him to our plan and invite him to participate on the steering committee.
- In Williamsburg, there are two potential bridge locations – one at the Community Park and the other at the end of Val Verde Ave, which could be a neighborhood connection.

- Important to plan discussions with Wburg leadership and residents about bridge locations. Evaluate pros and cons of each location and put forth a recommendation.
- **ACTION ITEM** – John will reach out to Wburg Mayor and Trustees to start bridge conversations.

River Access Working Group

- Almost finalized Existing Conditions Report
- Meeting with State Parks Boating Officer. Interested in supporting complementary signage and education. Helping us understand the implications of Boating Act and PFD use.
- Preliminary report of proposed improvements at existing and proposed launches
- NPS prepared to support “graphic illustrations” display boards for launch improvements that could be viewed at Farmers Market and other community events or gatherings.
- We could explore video taping a 12 hour day at Rotary Park to help us understand usage and flow. The Bend Parks and Recreation District completed a 12 hour time-lapse of a popular river put-in to help them better manage the site. [Riverbend Beach Hi Impact Timelapse 1 - YouTube](#)
- The RA working group determined Rotary Park could benefit from another design workshop. There is agreement on wetlands restoration, but we need to look at public use and flow in the area, especially if Rotary Park is a “gateway park” to accessing public lands across the river.

Wildlife & Conservation Working Groups

- We have research reports confirming pedestrian bridges may not be as detrimental to swallows as has been previously stated.
- Travis Day is convening a wildlife committee to help us understand issues and opportunities surrounding trail development and public use of the river corridor. Focus group representatives will likely include NM Game & Fish, Audubon Society, Ducks Unlimited, etc.
- Our goal is to develop a concept plan that will not get kicked back by BOR and BLM. We recognize NEPA compliance will be necessary and we want to address the potential hurdles/issues in advance.

Communications and Community Engagement

- We’ve had setbacks due to public health restrictions
- As TorC opens up – like Farmers Markets, how do we reach out to captive audiences?
- How can the TTN project be more transparent? How could City website support our project messaging? The City needs to be a partner in sharing project information.
- Website discussions, bring ideas in front of Commission. City staff not positive website could handle all the documents and resources we want to post on it. City is very supportive of sharing information. City Manager starts May 3rd. City recommends our Committee meet with Mr. Swingle prior to meeting with Commission.
- Community Boards are being updated at Rotary Park. John is updating and recently posted a new question. We’re not sure if anyone is monitoring the Williamsburg Community Park board.
- John has captured all responses via photos and we also have a spreadsheet of responses from the previous summer’s events
- We are maintaining a project Facebook Page, but it needs more effort.
- There is also an event page for promoting a Trail Run on October 30. **ACTION** Kim agreed to look over the information and get it shared on State and County tourism pages.
- If we set-up at Farmers Markets, we do need a “speakers bureau. TorC Brewery is willing to donate space to display project information.
- We could also display information at Visitor Center
- If we do a publication, it ought to summarize the big ideas for the TTN project. We need to determine who the audience is and what the message is. NPS willing to support efforts.

- **ACTION** Form a committee to develop a new publication. John, Kim, Gina, Merry Jo would be part of publication committee. The information we've collected so far can inform the publication.
- NPS can contract with graphic designer. **ACTION** John will talk to Mo

Rotary Park Design Workshop

- The NPS is willing to cost-share a community design workshop to really figure out Rotary Park design. With the City embarking on a Parks & Recreation Master Plan, Rotary Park should be an important amenity to focus on. The City has requested some funds for TTN support and that could be a match. **ACTION** – NPS will investigate costs for a 1-2 day workshop.
- It's important to engage all the users at Rotary Park in the design workshop – rafters and tubers, fishing people, birders, neighbors etc!

Next Steps

- NPS is accepting 2nd Year request from TorC and Williamsburg.
- Revisiting our workplan, partner responsibilities and deliverables needs to occur soon.