

Tower Area Trails Plan  
Steering Committee Meeting #1  
July 27, 2021, 5:00 p.m.  
Breitung Township Community Center

## SUMMARY

### Introductions

Russell Habermann, Senior Planner at ARDC Planning, welcomed everyone and asked attendees to introduce themselves.

*Attendees:* Brad Dekkers (DNR Parks & Trails), Jim Essig (Lake Vermilion Soudan Mine State Park), Aaron Kania (on behalf of self and Roxanne Tea), Nancy Larson (City of Tower), Steve Lotz (Lake Vermilion Trail Joint Powers Board), Bob Manzoline (St. Louis and Lake Rail Authority), Kevin Norby (Tower City Council), Ida Rukavina (Howard Wagoner Tower Ski Trail), Mike Schultz (Tower Economic Development Authority), Jodi Summit (Vermilion Country Charter School), Dianna Sunsdahl (Breitung Township)

### Process Overview

Nancy Larson, Grants Manager at the City of Tower, shared that the planning project is being funded by the City of Tower, the Tower Economic Development Authority, and the IRRR Trails Grant Program. Larson explained that the project came about when the City of Tower wanted to apply for trail construction funding this past year and realized an application would benefit from additional planning work. Then, further exploration of Tower trails identified that the entire Tower trails system would benefit from a plan to identify needed connections.

Habermann outlined the planning process, highlighting three phases: 1) collecting public input about existing trails and desired destinations, 2) conceptualizing trail connections based on public input and geographic data, and 3) creating a plan document that outlines desires for future trail development. This process will include three meetings of the steering committee, one for each phase of the process. The public will be asked to submit public input during Phase 1 and to provide feedback on the plan during Phase 3. The project is expected to be complete by December 2021.

In defining the scope of the project, Habermann asked the steering committee about the desired geographic area of the plan and the type of trails the steering committee hopes the plan will address. After conversation, the steering committee decided to let results of public input (through desired trail destinations identified by the public) guide the geographic scope of the plan; this may include considering how trails in Tower fit within the context of a regional inter-community network of trails. As for trail types, the steering committee identified the following trail types they expect to address within the plan:

- Paved non-motorized trails
- Hiking trails
- Ski trails (different styles of skiing will be taken into consideration)
- Mountain bike trails

- Kayak/water trails
- Horse riding trails
- Snowshoe trails
- ATV/OHV trails
- Snowmobile trails (roles of grant-in-aid trails versus state trails will be considered)

Also brought forward during this conversation was the multiple mode uses of some trails (and sometimes, for motorized trails, through seasonal leases), the different designs of trails based on context (i.e. loop trails versus travel trails), trails amenities (i.e. parking, rest areas, washrooms, signage), and the decision to treat street facilities (i.e. ATV lanes, bike lanes, sidewalks) within this plan not as “trails” but as “trail connections”.

### **Review Trails Inventory**

Habermann asked the steering committee to refer to a print-out trail map of the Tower area and asked for revisions that need to be made to make sure it includes all existing trails. The following revisions were brought forward:

- Ask Bois Forte if we could add the groomed ski trails on the Fortune Bay golf course
- Add the Tower Harbor trails
- Add the Prospector’s ATV Loop
- Add the Ancient Cedars Trail
- Add the hiking trails north of Tower
- Explore Soudan trails (seems like something is missing) and add trails as discovered
- Add Jasper Peak hiking trail
- Add other Mesabi Trail connections between Tower and Ely
- Add additional trails from the DNR and State Park (i.e. Arrowhead Trail, Putnam/Fishing Lakes Trails, State Park hiking trails)
- Consider adding ski trails at Bear Head Lake State Park (pending identification of plan’s geographic scope)
- Consider adding dashed lines of planned but not completed trails to map (i.e. Lake Vermilion Trail, Mesabi Trail segments)

Habermann will send a revised map to the steering committee for further review during the month of August.

### **Discuss Public Input Strategies**

Habermann said the next step in the process is to collect information from the public about perception of existing trails and information about desired destinations. He brought forward a few ideas of collecting this information (i.e. community survey, engagement boards at local businesses) and asked the steering committee what they think might work or has worked for collecting data from Tower area residents in the past. The steering committee provided the following ideas:

- Offer both paper and online options for a survey
- Consider a direct mail option for residents of Tower and Soudan

- Utilize social media to spread the word (i.e. tag area organization Facebook pages in posts promoting the survey or ask those pages to post about the survey)
- Engage with area organizations (i.e. Lake Vermilion Resort & Tourism Association, Lake Vermilion Chamber of Commerce, Friends of the Lake Vermilion Trail, Club Mesabi) to help spread the word about the survey
- Interview area organizations (i.e. Lake Vermilion Resort & Tourism Association, Lake Vermilion Chamber of Commerce, Friends of the Lake Vermilion Trail, Club Mesabi) about trail development desires
- Hang flyers or provide paper surveys at area businesses/destinations (i.e. Ely Bike Shop, Sulu's, Post Office)
- Survey existing trail users
- Hold an open house or host a booth at an event (ATVAM Conference on September 17-19)

Using these ideas, Habermann will put together a public input proposal for the steering committee to review and provide feedback on virtually. Habermann noted that it would be good to have any opportunity for public input posted by mid-August and then be open for one full month.

### **Next Steps**

- ARDC Planning will prepare meeting notes and distribute them to the steering committee.
- ARDC Planning will develop a public input proposal and send it to the steering committee for review before starting data collection.
- Brad Dekkers and Jim Essig will send ARDC Planning additional DNR trail shapefiles.
- ARDC Planning will revise the existing trails map and send an updated version to the steering committee for further review.

**The meeting adjourned at 6:12 pm.**