



MT Trails Foundation Promotes New Paved Off-the-Road Bike and Pedestrian Paths

By Holly Leider, MD, Mequon Thiensville Community Foundation Volunteer

In January 2022, the MT Trails Foundation became a 501(c)(3) nonprofit after being conceived in 2021 by a group of passionate citizens in the Mequon and Thiensville community. The mission of MT Trails is to fund and create and maintain a network of off-the-road pedestrian/bike trails throughout Mequon and Thiensville through grants and private donations. This involves including both landowners and residents in the planning of the trails with sensitivity to concerns including location, privacy, safety and appearance.

MT Trail's first project is the Highland Road Bike Spur which connects the Ozaukee Interurban Trail in Mequon to Rotary Park via a 1.5 mile trail along Highland Road. The Foundation has received a government TAP grant and private money which already covers 70% of the cost.

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Dylan Shneyder (left) enjoys the Ozaukee Interurban Trail in Mequon with his brother, Jackson, in April

In the past, studies throughout the nation regarding the development of pedestrian trails have been undertaken. In these studies, trails generally increased property values, had no effect on crime, and increased quality of life for community residents. Realtors often use a home's proximity to a bike trail as a selling point. Studies have shown increasing house prices for homes near trails and green belts (an area of open land around a city, on which building is restricted), and especially for homes near trails IN greenbelts.

One measure employed is that of a "walk/bike score." A score of 70 or above is seen as desirable. Many real estate search sites feature walk/bike scores prominently. In the suburbs, Whitefish Bay has a walk/bike score of 72/58, Shorewood 85/82. In Cedarburg the score is 73/69 and in Mequon, 11/32 with a walk score of 54 for Thiensville (no bike score was available for Thiensville). Of note, Mequon is technically classified as an "exurb", which is a district outside a city, especially a prosperous area beyond the suburbs. While it is natural that a community with more rural area would have a lower walk score, there is a potential "liveability" issue when an area develops in a way in which automobile traffic increases, but pedestrian access does not.

Mequon has measures in place to avoid over-development, yet certain highly trafficked roads are becoming dangerous spots for bikes and pedestrians with increasing accidents. The network of off-the-road trails on roads already used by cyclists will offset the danger of increased vehicular traffic, making the community more "livable" for everyone including bicyclists, runners, walkers, dog walkers and children. There is currently an ordinance in place in Mequon that some new businesses and new housing developments must include pedestrian access. This meshes nicely with the vision of connected trails throughout the area. While bike lanes are increasingly turning up in many cities, off-the-road trails are simply safer including for driver liability, relevant as distracted driving is now a leading cause of vehicular accidents.

The planned trails will increase quality of life, health and safety by providing opportunities for outdoor activity, increasing accessibility to our abundant parks and connecting areas within the community.

Many residents already see and appreciate MT Trail's vision and contribute in any way that they can to make Mequon/Thiensville more pedestrian and bike friendly. How can you help? By allowing access if a trail comes along your property, by providing input and by volunteering time on the committee and more. To learn more about how you can help, please visit www.mtcfgives.org/bikepath.



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