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Kathy Motchall
Harbor Springs City Council
560 Sargent St.
Harbor Springs, MI, 49740

Hi Kathy,

I'm writing today regarding the "Harbor Way," the envisioned extension of the Little Traverse Wheelway from its current terminus at Kosequat Park into downtown Harbor Springs. With the recent departures of Parks Director Rachel Roon and City Manager Victor Sinadinowski, I want to be sure to document the history of the project and hopefully make sure that it stays alive until such time as new staff are hired. I'm reaching out to you about this because I know you've had an interest in the project and shown support for it in the past.

To provide some background, the Little Traverse Wheelway is a non-motorized trail running 26 miles around Little Traverse Bay from Harbor Springs to Charlevoix. The most recent segment of the Wheelway, a four-mile stretch along M-119 from the Harbor Springs Airport to Kosequat Park at the eastern outskirts of Harbor Springs, was completed in 2010. Harbor Inc., Top of Michigan Trails Council, Little Traverse Township, and Emmet County were all instrumental in promoting and coordinating the completion of that segment.

These partners, along with the City of Harbor Springs, envisioned that a safe, dedicated route that would eventually extend into downtown Harbor Springs, the destination of many Wheelway users (currently there is some confusion among Wheelway users on how to actually get downtown from Kosequat Park). To that end, plans were made in 2018 to create a final segment connecting with the Wheelway at Tourist Park on the east end of Harbor Springs via a surface crossing of M-119 at the Lake Street intersection. However, when the FEMA-funded Shay Drain Culvert was constructed, it was envisioned that this could do "double duty" as a M-119 underpass (it was actually designed partially with this in mind!).

When MDOT was approached about this in 2020, they were not supportive, citing safety concerns about floodwaters. Thus, a study to document the nature and frequency of water flow through the Shay Drain Culvert was implemented by Harbor Inc., in conjunction with City staff and the City's engineering consultant (Benchmark Engineering) in 2021 and 2022.

This hydrologic study found that although stormwater did on occasion flow down the Shay Drain and enter the culvert, it would take an unusually extreme rain event for this to happen. During the most intense rainfall over the 478-day monitoring period (2.5" on 9/3/22), the maximum depth of water flowing through the culvert was only about 2"—well below the threshold volume to present a serious safety hazard for any bikers or pedestrians who happened to be in the culvert at the time.

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Based on Harbor Inc.'s hydrology study, in February, 2023 MDOT approved use of the culvert as an underpass for the Harbor Way. As such, plans then began proceeding to complete construction of the Harbor Way via the culvert underpass to Bay Street (the section below the culvert and along Zoll Street is already completed). Engineering plans were developed and project costs estimated (the latest estimate being in excess of \$800,000). An easement to cross a portion of the County's Bay Bluffs property was obtained. In late-2023, Rachel, in collaboration with an informal group of project supporters (the "Harbor Way Committee," directory attached) began efforts to raise the money through a combination of grants, private donations, fundraising events, etc. At that time, a preliminary timeline for beginning construction was envisioned/hoped to be Fall, 2025.

To-date, somewhere in the vicinity of \$40,000 has been raised toward this project through donations. Much of this came through a link to the project that Rachel had on the City's website (which is still there) as well as signage at the Shay Drain Culvert and periodic informational booths at the Farmer's Market and the Sk8Park. The Trails Council has also secured some donations earmarked for this project.

It was not envisioned that these types of donations would likely raise enough funding for the project, but that they would serve as a match and show of public support for funding through a variety of grant programs (e.g. MDNR's Land Trust Fund and MDOT's Transportation Alternatives Program). In fact, Rachel had been planning to pursue some of these grants, but then decided to hold off until the new City Manager had settled in and the new City Council (in the wake for Fall, 2025 elections) determined its priorities.

Given the frightfully high-cost estimate of the project, one option that had also been under discussion was a partial trail extension from Kosequat Park along the Bay Bluffs site to Zoll Street without an elaborate M-119 underpass. While a less desirable scenario, especially from a safety standpoint, it would be better than the current situation.

I know the Committee would greatly appreciate anything you can do to keep this project going. Please let me know if you'd like any more information at this time. I know that Trails Council staff would likewise be happy to consult with City officials about a strategy for this. I also suspect that there is more complete documentation of this project somewhere in Rachel's files.

Thank you!

Sincerely,



Doug Fuller, Harbor Inc. Board Member

Enclosure

Copies: Kyle Knight, Interim City Manager
Brent Bolin, Executive Director, Top of Michigan Trails Council
Doug Mantha, Executive Director, HARBOR Inc.

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