
ANOTHER VOICE / TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

Frances Gotcsik and Phil Haberstro: NFTA must resolve land issues blocking progress

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We are thrilled to learn that the Town and City of Tonawanda and Erie County parks officials have stepped up their efforts to create a six-mile multiuse trail from North Buffalo to within sight of the Canalway Trail in Tonawanda.

We have been eager to see action on this corridor since 2004, when we planned to work with Erie County Department of Public Works officials to advance this project as part of Parks & Trails New York's Healthy Trails, Healthy People Program, an initiative designed to assist communities with the creation of multiuse trails.

Unfortunately, uncertainties surrounding the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority's plans for the corridor have prevented any efforts at trail development.

This is truly an ideal trail project because of the number of neighborhoods, schools, health centers, parks, athletic fields, shopping areas and other community resources that are adjacent to this former rail bed. When transformed into a multiuse trail, we can envision it filled with people of all ages and abilities walking, jogging or riding bikes as they connect with friends and family and get health-enhancing physical activity as they run errands, go to school or undertake other daily activities without the use of a car.

The Erie Canalway Trail in the City of Tonawanda is a great example of the type of usage that this trail would receive.

We all know that walking and biking can help us improve health at any age. And research confirms that where residents have easy access to resources like trails, they are more physically active. Finding additional means for people to be more physically active is especially important in Erie County, where recent data indicates

that the number of overweight or obese adults is almost 63 percent, which is higher than the state average of 60 percent.

Former rail corridors such as this one are irreplaceable assets. Parks & Trails New York's more than 25 years' experience helping communities develop trails across the state has shown that they can provide significant economic, health and quality-of-life benefits. Therefore, we urge the landowner, the NFTA, to resolve any outstanding issues and complete an agreement with Erie County to allow transformation of this long-neglected, urban-suburban open space into an inviting community resource that will enhance surrounding property values, provide a critical link to the internationally recognized Erie Canalway Trail, and, most importantly, offer opportunities for safe, off-road active transportation for area residents.

We cannot afford to jeopardize the funding for this project that is already in place. It is imperative that people become actively engaged to get a trail for the Town and City of Tonawanda firmly back on track.

Comments

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