

MEETING NOTES

June 6, 2024



Great Parks

MEETING OVERVIEW

In April and May 2024, Great Parks hosted a series of neighborhood meetings to discuss the West Region Blueway & Trail System's (WRBTS) proposed shared-use trail with those who could be most affected by its eventual construction. Invitations were sent via US mail to property owners, residents, businesses, and other stakeholders located along and/or in near proximity to the proposed route. In Miamitown, the distribution area for invitations was expanded to include the whole business district, as well as other nearby areas on both the east and west sides of the river.

In addition to sharing information about the proposed trail system with participants, these meetings were held as opportunities for Great Parks to directly answer questions and listen to participants' thoughts, ideas, and concerns about the proposed shared-use trail route. Information gathered will be used to help fine-tune route concepts being developed and to identify any potential issues that need further attention before moving to the next stage of project development.

The meetings included a short introductory presentation followed by an extensive question, comment, and response session. Participants were provided with a one-pager about the WRBTS project and maps of the route segments being discussed at the meetings. Participants were also encouraged to review a large print map highlighting the full route and to add their notes to the map as needed.

MEETING DETAILS

Date & Location	Details
April 22, 2024 Neighborhood Meeting for central Hamilton County (Segments 5 & 6)	Location: Miami Township Community Center Number of Mailed Invitations: 146 Community Leaders in Attendance: Mike Robison (Trustee, Miami Township), Doug Blanton (Trustee, Miami Township), Tim Vollrath (Trustee, Miami Township), Jim Brett (Administrator, Miami Township & Trustee, Whitewater Township), Willie Pope (Trustee, Whitewater Township)
April 23, 2024 Neighborhood Meeting for southern Hamilton County (Segments 7 & 8)	Location: Carriage House Farm Number of Mailed Invitations: 52 Community Leaders in Attendance: Doug Sammons (Mayor, Village of North Bend), Chuck Birkholtz (Mayor, Village of Cleves), Willie Pope (Trustee, Whitewater Township)
May 2, 2024 Open House for Miamitown (Segments 4 & 5)	Location: Miamitown Church of Christ Number of Mailed Invitations: 398 Community Leaders in Attendance: None

Date & Location	Details
May 7, 2024 Neighborhood Meeting for northern Hamilton County (Segments 1, 2 & 3)	Location: Colerain Township Senior & Community Center Number of Mailed Invitations: 65 Community Leaders in Attendance: Tawanna Molter (Assistant Public Services Director, Colerain Township)

KEY DISCUSSION POINTS AND LEARNINGS

Overall, most participants were excited and supportive about the proposed WRBTS and concepts for the shared-use trail. Discussions were generally positive, and many participants offered support to help advance planning and development. Questions most often were related to planning and operational logistics. Participants' concerns centered on potential impacts to private properties, privacy, and general uncertainty on how to build a shared-use trail that is completely separated from nearby roads, considering the challenging terrain of some portions of the corridor. Below is a summary of key discussion points and learnings gained.

Economic Development – Community and businesses leaders were generally very interested in the economic development opportunities that the WRBTS offers. However, some community leaders were concerned that the shared-use trail could create swaths of undevelopable land which would decrease communities' economic growth opportunities. Some residents and other owners of private property (particularly in western Colerain Township) noted that increased economic growth, which sometimes comes with shared-use trails, would be a concern as they prefer the private, remote character of their properties. They also don't want to pay higher taxes that may result from increased property values.

Funding – Participants showed interest in/concern about how the WRBTS would be funded. Great Parks noted that there are a variety of potential local, state, and federal funding sources that can be tapped into and emphasized that community support and partnerships will be needed to secure funding. It was also noted that Great Parks would be responsible for funding development that occurs on park property.

Property Acquisition – Some participants asked how property needed for the shared-use trail would be acquired. Great Parks noted that the goal is to keep the trail on public property, including Great Parks property, as much as possible. For the sections not on Great Parks' property, the method of acquisition would be determined by the community in which the sections are located and would likely take the form of easements or land purchases. Great Parks also noted that the use of eminent domain is never deployed by the park district. Some meeting attendees (particularly in western Colerain Township) indicated that they were not interested in granting an easement or selling portions of their property to support the shared-use trail.

Railroad Track – There is a railroad track located in Colerain Township that appears to be abandoned and extends from the property line of Fieldelvey Steel to the Great Parks property

directly south, paralleling E. Miami River Rd. This section of track could potentially be used for the shared-use trail. The WRBTS project team is going to look more closely at the ownership and usage of these tracks to determine if they are a feasible option for the trail.

Route Concerns

Several specific concerns were raised about the proposed shared-use route. These include:

- As currently designed, the route would bisect some private properties and farms. Owners of some of these properties indicated they will not support a shared-use path on their property.
- Owners of residential/farm properties were concerned that strangers traveling on the trail would have access to their properties. Some noted that they bought their properties for privacy and to protect them from future development.
- A portion of the proposed shared-use route in Colerain Township crosses through a Scout camp owned by the Southern Ohio Dog & Game Protective Association.
- There are a number of places along the proposed route where geography or existing development will likely limit where a separate shared-use path can be built. At the same time, the speed of vehicles and frequent presence of big trucks using roads in these areas precludes building a path either in or immediately next to the roadway. Great Parks noted that using traffic calming measures may be a viable solution to this concern.

River Confluence – Although the blueway was not a primary topic at these meetings, community leaders from Whitewater Township used the opportunity to express concerns about extending the blueway trail through the confluence of the Whitewater River and Great Miami River.

- They said there are hazards in this area due to strong currents where the river waters meet and the presence of construction/bridge debris located underwater (which is often not visible from the surface).
- There have been a number of deaths in the area over the years due to these conditions, lack of awareness of the hazards and inexperienced paddlers.

