



Root River Trail Extension Citizens Exploratory Committee

Wednesday, August 5, 2026 - 3:30 PM

Houston Nature Center
215 W Plum Street
Houston, MN 55943

Microsoft Teams

Join: <https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/264198943018694?p=wcfYiT56kKi91VvPgq>

Meeting ID: 264 198 943 018 694

Passcode: HN9cT29t

AGENDA

Call to Order

Roll Call

1. Items for Consideration

1.a July 8, 2026 Meeting Minutes by consent

2. Discussion Items

2.a Federal Congressionally Directed Spending Request (Status)

2.b Preparation of a 2026-27 Work Plan

3. Public Comment

4. Next Meeting - September 16, 2026 - La Crescent Chamber of Commerce and Tourism

5. Adjournment

cc: Honorable Mayor, City Council Members, City Attorney, City Administrator

Root River Trail Extension - Citizens Exploratory Committee
Meeting minutes.

Date: July 8th, 2026

Location: Hokah Fire Station, 9 Mill Street Hokah, MN

1. Call To Order, Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 3:06 p.m. by Larry Kirch, City of La Crescent, Community Development Director.

Members Present: Dick Wieser – La Crescent, Larry Stryker – La Crescent, Jake Olson – Hokah, Bridget Mullen – Hokah, Ben Horn, - Houston County, Michelle Hoskins – Houston, Jay Wheaton - Houston

Members Absent: Honor DiDonato – Houston County (excused)

Others Present: Allison Wagner, EDA/Houston County, Kent Skaar, DNR, Louise Thompson, DNR, Travis Vicker, DNR

- 2. June 10 Minutes** – The minutes from the June meeting were sent out with the agenda. Larry Kirch asked for any changes or comments on the minutes. There were none and the minutes were accepted by consensus.

3. Discussion Items

a. Grant/Grant Writing Activities

- i. MnDNR ENRTF-LCCMR Grant Application for 2026/27 – Not Funded (Discussion) – This grant application was not funded. This item was more thoroughly discussed below.
- ii. Federal Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) – Status
This project is still pending review in the Senate Appropriations Committee and the subcommittee on Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development.
- iii. USDOT Fed Grant –BUILD Grant – This project was not funded and we will have to decide if we want to submit next year. USDOT will offer a debrief of our application. We took them up on that last year and it improved our application but yet it was not funded. In looking at the applications, no shared-use trails were funded in the country. Most all were road projects with a few maritime and airport projects funded.
- iv. Future Funding Opportunities – Much of the meeting was devoted to speaking with DNR Trails staff Kent Skaar debriefing on the approach the group had been taking regarding grant funding. The idea was to obtain insight on the three questions that were posed to the DNR in an email: Where should we focus our energy? What are we overlooking in all of this? Do we have any allies other than perhaps our legislators and the Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota?

The DNR has 26-28 trails that they are “supporting.” The DNR Trails staff are “here to assist.” As far as the LCCMR grants program goes, the DNR will get \$9 million for 2027 in LCCMR dollars for 12 projects that include new construction, bridge reconstruction, a new bridge and design, engineering and permitting for some trails. This is a small bites approach. Another way that communities do this is through Bond Appropriations that are supported by the department but submitted by us. Kent suggested that if we draft legislation that we not be so specific. Be broader in our ask to include acquisition, design, engineering and permitting. He thinks we should not try to do everything at once, take a phased approach. A project costs about .5 million dollars per mile and bridges are ¾ to 2 million dollars. Taking smaller segments, is because bonding has to be spent in 4 ½ years. If we focus on a trail just to Miller’s Corner, DNR can help by putting a project in their LCCMR application. Kent is retiring next week and Scott Haugen will be his replacement. We could ask for engineering design to Miller’s corner which would be due in 2027 with funding in 2028. Kent said we are doing the right things.

The group thanked Kent for his help with this and attending the meeting today.

- b. Draft Joint Powers Agreement** – Status – Larry Kirch again relayed that the City Attorney sent it to the County Attorney and we will be scheduling a meeting with the County Board at some point to discuss the draft JPA.
- c. Drafting of sample/generic LOIs, Offers, Easements, etc.** Larry suggested that he circle back with the City Attorney on drafting these items that could be used with willing property owners.
- d. Building Support for a Trail Extension**
 - i. Historic Bluff Country National Scenic Byway Plan Update by MnDOT - MnDOT has hired two Regional Development Organizations to update the Apple Blossom State Scenic Byway and the Historic Bluff Country National Scenic Byway (Mn Hwy 16) master plans. This area of Minnesota (Region 10) does not have a regional planning agency as it was disbanded in the 1980s so MnDOT contracted with the RDOs from Mora Mn and Mankato MN. The plans will have a steering committee and there will be future public meetings. The plans will be completed by the end of 2026. These plans are important and can open up federal funding for projects related to the byway including marketing. For the Historic Bluff Country National Scenic Byway, we should make sure that the final plan strongly supports the Root River Trail and its extension.
 - ii. Root River Trail Towns – “Friends Groups” – Many successful trail initiatives have a broader level of support beyond a committee such as we have. Are there opportunities for creating a broader friends group in addition to this group? Some items for future discussion and action include speaking with the Preston group or having our group go to Preston and meet with their group. Sheila Craig’s name was mentioned. It was also brought up by Michelle Hoskins that we should think about inviting the City of Rushford to be part of any meeting with legislators. Setting up a

meeting with the new State Senator and with the House Rep for 26B is important for this project. The suggestion is being made to have a meeting with all three mayors and the county board with our legislators on this project. The group will also update the property owner spreadsheet for the area covered in the 2011 DNR Master Plan. Building a strategy and resources will be important to begin to build community support. Looking at planning funding such as the Falck Foundation of the University of Minnesota Empowering Small Minnesota Communities Program should be explored.

4. **Public Comment** (none)
5. **Next Meeting** – The group decided to hold their next meeting on September 9th.
6. **Adjourn** – the meeting was adjourned at 4:21 p.m.

Meeting minutes drafted by Larry Kirch, City of La Crescent, Community Development Director