

Our View

River Trail project deserves another chance to succeed

The River Trail Commission gave preliminary endorsement recently to a Highway 45 multi-use crossing that could be billed as the initial phase of the proposed River Trail between Eagle River and St. Germain.

We think that's a big deal because the River Trail would connect Eagle River and Three Lakes, via the Three Eagle Trail, to the 52-mile Heart of Vilas County Trail System — a proven boon to the tourism industry in many parts of the county and many other counties in Wisconsin.

Just think about gelling together the scenic beauty of the Wisconsin River, and area lakes and forests, with a bike/pedestrian trail that could take cyclists from Three Lakes to Boulder Junction and beyond.

That vision is why the commission and Great Headwaters Trails (GHT) have been working so hard to convince the City of Eagle River and the town of Lincoln to get on board with Cloverland and St. Germain — to add this silent sports element to a tourism industry that needs all the help it can get.

The River Trail plan has gotten a bum rap thus far, criticized as unsafe and overly expensive by community leaders who clearly didn't have all the facts before them.

It started early on with city officials talking down the trail for "crossing Highway 70 four times" between County Highway H and downtown, though the maps clearly showed that it never crosses Highway 70 in that busy stretch west of Eagle River.

The proposed trail would cross Highway 70 just twice — once just west of the Wisconsin River bridge near the Honey Bear restaurant and a second time at Old Highway 70, about halfway to St. Germain.

Town and city officials have questioned project costs of up to \$12 million dollars and speculated about the need for local matching dollars that might be needed to secure state and federal grants, overlooking the pledge by GHT to locate all of the funding.

What we'd like to see is a third joint meeting of the River Trail Commission and the city council to rectify disagreements that were based on misinformation. And we'd like to see the town of Lincoln, for the sake of tourism and economic growth, get on board.

Behind the editorial 'we'

Members of the Vilas County News-Review editorial board include Publisher Kurt Krueger, Assistant Editors Josephine Hinderman and Audrey Lehman, Sports Editor Jacob Heid.