

# The Westfield Republican

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WESTFIELD REPUBLICAN, Thursday, June 8, 2023



Around 75 people turned out for the first ever Friends of Chautauqua County Greenways public meeting in Mayville.

## Groups eye collaboration to aid work with trails

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MAYVILLE — There are a number of trail groups in Chautauqua County. This week, representatives from a number of them gathered to begin planning ways to work together, which will hopefully help them financially and also to create a countywide mapping program.

On Tuesday was the first ever Friends of Chautauqua County Greenways meeting at Lakeside Park. There were around 75 people in attendance, representing groups such as the Chautauqua County Equestrian Trail System, the Western New York Mountain Bike Association, Chautauqua County Rails to Trails, Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy, Revitalize Dunkirk, the city of Jamestown, the County Parks System, the Chautauqua County Snow-

mobile Federation and the Boutwell Hill Ski Club.

"We got together because we've been working in silos for so long that there was no communication among the various trail groups, so that kind of got us to get the ball rolling," said Jacob Bodway, trail coordinator for Chautauqua County.

Bodway noted that many of the various trail groups seek grant funds on their own, but the foundations prefer the groups come together and apply as a unified organization. That will not only increase their chance of success, but also allow them to seek much larger grants from groups like the Ralph Wilson Foundation and from New York state's recently approved Clean Water, Clean Air and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act.

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Another goal of the organizations is to create a countywide mapping program, where people can go to one place to see all the trails in Chautauqua County, for hiking, biking, horseback riding, and skiing.

"That's going to help promote the trails in the county, but also bring the trail groups together under one structure to work together," he said.

Barton & Loguidice has been hired to create the mapping program. It's expected to take around a year to complete.

Once it's finished, it will be available electronically and likely in print as well. The Sheldon House recently awarded funding for the project.

Bodway said there are 40 miles of groomed fat bike trails, 400 miles of snowmobile trails, 25 miles of equestrian trails, 25 miles of Rails to Trails from Brocton to Sherman, 45 miles of Overland trails traversing nine state forests and private properties, 45 miles of shared use mountain bike trails, and the 40-mile long Marden Cobb Waterways Trails.

"Name another county in Western New York that

has those kind of trails with waterways, equestrian trails, snowmobile trails, and mountain bike trails. They just don't have it but it's here (in Chautauqua County)," he said during the meeting.

Bodway wants to promote the trails throughout the region for both tourism and way of life.

Twan Leenders with the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy said having a good trail system will help encourage people to relocate to the county.

"People live out west where their backyards catch on fire all the time," he said. "People live down south and have hurricanes all the time. We don't have that and we're already seeing, increasingly, people looking for areas like ours to relocate to."

Leenders noted that 150 years ago, Chautauqua County's economy was driven by its water and forests. "I really believe that. ... We can make our forests and our water our

biggest economic drivers for this area again," he said.

Some of the comments from the audience was that they want to keep trails unpaved, and if possible, future trails should always be developed as multi-use.

Bodway said he will probably hold another Friends of Chautauqua County Greenways meeting in the near future to keep groups engaged and prioritize needs in the county. No dates or locations have been finalized.

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