Chapter One. Purpose and Planning Process

Project Overview

This implementation plan is the result of over three years of community-wide discussions and cooperative planning efforts in the greater Three Rivers and St. Joseph County Community. While this document focuses on pathway development and pedestrian connectivity, it is also representative of a much greater effort to establish a collaborative environment in the greater Three Rivers area. As used throughout this document, the "Three Rivers Community" constitutes the geographical areas within the City of Three Rivers and Fabius Township. However, for the purpose of this document and future pathway planning and development efforts, the "Three Rivers Community" refers to one, larger cooperative community.

Project Background

This past winter, the City of Three Rivers and Fabius Township, in partnership with the St. Joseph County Land Use Council, St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation, the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency and St. Joseph County Michigan State University Extension (the project partners), agreed to work together to explore the possibility of and establish consensus around, the development of a non-motorized pathway connection between the Three Rivers Health Medical Center, located in the City of Three Rivers and Meyer Broadway Park, located in Fabius Township. The effort was initiated by local leaders who expressed a desire to explore new opportunities for recreation and non-motorized connections throughout the community. Previous planning efforts, including the 2007 *Three Rivers Area Non-Motorized Study*, revealed community-wide interest in a regional pathway system. In fact, a connection between the Three Rivers Health Medical Center and Meyer Broadway Park was identified as a top non-motorized priority in a community-wide survey. In addition, local leaders acknowledge research that suggests non-motorized pathways contribute to the overall quality of life of a community.

> "Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."
>
> - Ralph Waldo Emerson

With funding provided by Waste Management and a grant of assistance provided by the *Partnerships for Change Sustainable Communities Program*, the two municipalities and project partners initiated a comprehensive community planning and pathway exploration process in April of 2010. Partnerships for Change (PfC) - Sustainable Communities is a multi-jurisdictional planning assistance program administered by the Land Information Access Association (LIAA), a non-profit community service

organization. The overall mission of the program is to foster new and expanded cooperation between cities, townships and villages in developing and carrying out local land use policies that contribute to the preservation of cultural and natural resources. Program sponsors include the Michigan Municipal League (MML), Michigan Townships Association (MTA), Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) and the Michigan Association of Planning (MAP).

Planning Process

In April, a local steering committee kicked off a five-step community planning and pathway exploration process. The steering committee consisted of representatives from the City, Township and each project partner. The steering committee also included representatives from the Three Rivers Community Foundation and Waste Management. Over the next seven months, LIAA and the steering committee worked together through the following five steps:

Step One. LIAA staff and the City of Three Rivers engineer conducted a preliminary visual audit of the target project area, identifying both potential pathway assets and challenges. LIAA staff then met with the local steering committee to discuss the results of the visual audit and identify additional pathway assets and potential challenges.

LIAA staff and the local steering committee then worked together to map a series of *preliminary* pathway options, connecting the Three Rivers Health Medical Center and Meyer Broadway Park. In mapping the *preliminary* pathway options, steering committee members took into consideration several factors, including the results of the preliminary walking audit, property ownership, physical obstacles, road and driveway crossings, the potential need for easements, existing land use, natural features and the potential proximity to other pedestrian links and community assets (see *Maps Two, Three, Four and Five).*

Step Two. Following several extensive discussions, the local steering committee determined and mapped a *preferred route* for the pathway. Among other things, the *preferred route* would require the local jurisdictions to secure easements from several neighboring property owners. Aware of the hurdles sometimes associated with securing pathway easements from local property owners, the steering committee identified and mapped several *alternative* routes for the pathway, most notably on public right-of-ways.

Step Two: Mapping the Preferred Pathway Location - The local steering committee considers several factors (using a series of maps) to determine the preferred location of the pathway.

Step Three. With the preferred (and alternative) route(s) of the pathway identified, the local steering committee made efforts to meet and talk with local property owners and gauge their support for a pathway on their property. Through this effort, the steering committee was able to address specific concerns and questions from property owners.

Step Four. In July, LIAA staff and members of the local steering committee conducted a more extensive walking audit of the *preferred* pathway location. This effort provided the steering committee with a better understanding of the physical attributes, barriers and opportunities of the *preferred* pathway location.

Step Five. In September, October and November, members ofthe local steering committee met with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to discuss possible pedestrian improvements at the Millard and U.S. 131 intersection, potential state and federal funding opportunities and future opportunities for collaboration. Steering committee members also discussed the parameters of an informal *memorandum of understanding* that would allow neighboring property owners to demonstrate consensus, mutual understanding and support around continuing efforts to explore and develop a pathway along their properties. Finally, LIAA staff and the local steering committee initiated work on this document.

Purpose of the Implementation Plan

The purpose of this plan is to provide the framework for cooperative planning and the development and management of a proposed non-motorized pathway between the Three Rivers Health Medical Center and Meyer Broadway Park. To that end, this plan will:

- Provide a tool-set that will enable the City of Three Rivers, Fabius Township, and the project partners to plan for, design, and fund a non-motorized pathway.
- Discuss the operational framework for the implementation and development of a non-motorized pathway between the Three Rivers Health Medical Center and Meyer Broadway Park.
- Establish the framework for on-going communication and cooperation between the City of Three Rivers, Fabius Township and the project partners.
- Provide resources, additional capacity and support material(s) on non-motorized pathways.

Step Three: Reaching Out - The local steering committee hold meeting(s) (and phone conference) with local property owners to gauge their support of a preferred pathway.

Step Four: Walking Audit - LIAA staff members and the local steering committee conduct a more detailed walking audit of the preferred pathway location.

Chapter Two. Proposed Pathway and Community Context

The local steering committee is working to develop a 1.5 mile non-motorized pathway that would connect the Three Rivers Health Medical Center and Meyer Broadway Park. This chapter describes the obstacles and opportunities associated with each phase (or segment) of the *preferred* and *alternative* routes of the pathway. *Map One* illustrates the *preferred* and *alternative* routes for the pathway

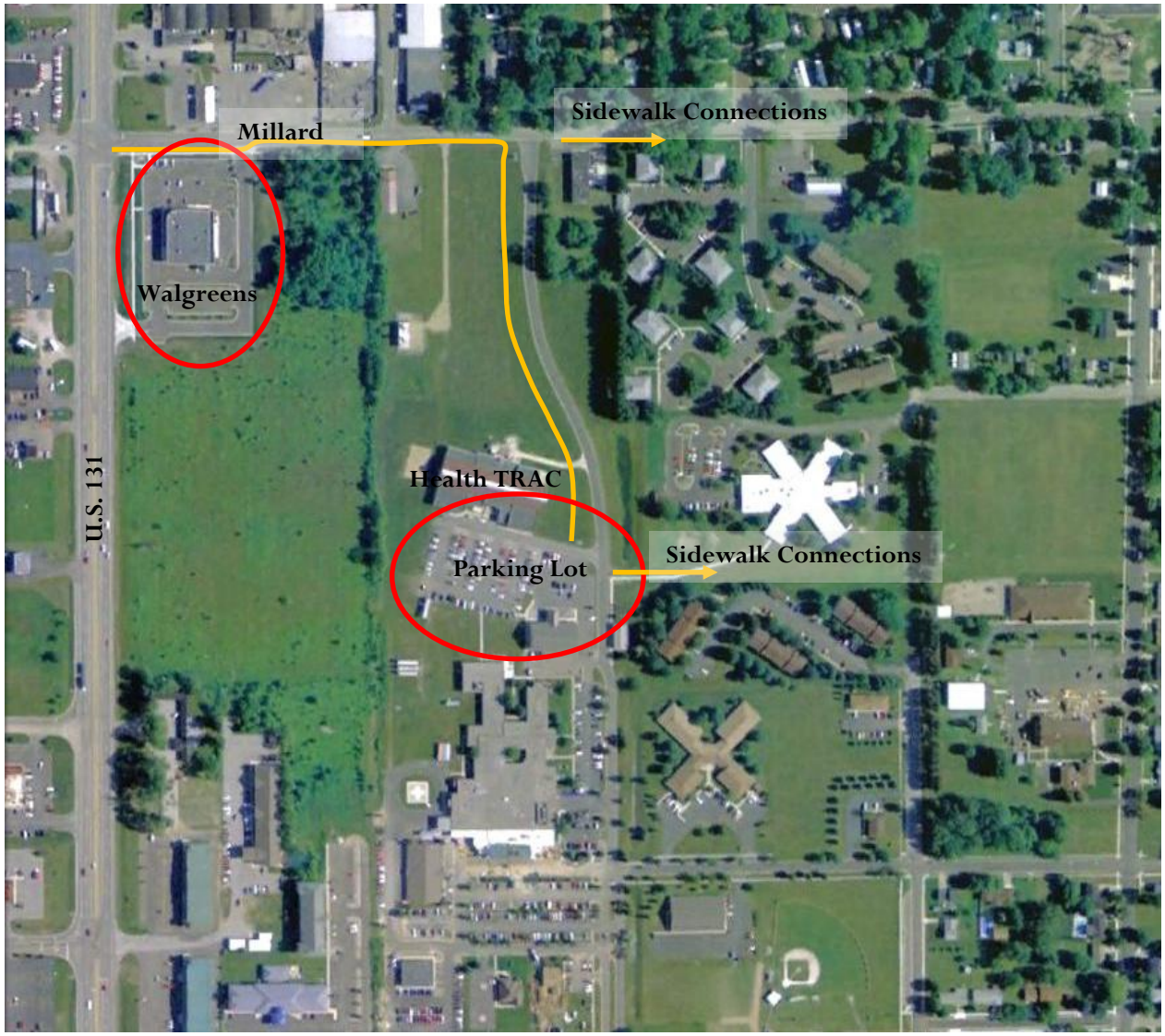
Phase I. Three Rivers Health Medical Center to U.S. 131

The Three Rivers Health Medical Center is a non-profit regional medical center and health care organization, providing care to 40,000 people within its service area. Among other things, the Medical Center offers inpatient services (including a birthing center and emergency room), diagnostic & outpatient services, specialty clinics, and family-care and support groups.

The Three Rivers Health Medical Center provides an excellent starting point for the proposed pathway. Steering committee members envision that the pathway would begin at the north end of the campus, adjacent to the Health TRAC. This area of the medical campus includes a large parking lot and sidewalks that connect to the adjacent neighborhood and ultimately downtown Three Rivers and the city's Riverfront Trail. In addition, the proposed pathway would further support efforts by the Medical Center to provide and promote new opportunities for physical fitness, active living and better health within the community.

Phase I. - The proposed pathway would begin near the Health Track, on the Three Rivers Health Medical Center Campus. This area of the campus provides access to a large parking area and sidewalk connections to the surrounding community, including the city's Riverfront Trail.

Phase I. Three Rivers Health Medical Center to U.S. 131



From this area of the campus, the pathway would head north, along the existing service drive, to the existing sidewalk on Millard Road. Pictured at right is an example of what the pathway could look like. A larger image can be found in *Appendix K* at the end of this document.

From this point, the pathway would head west - in the location of the existing sidewalk along Millard Road, to the U.S. 131 intersection. The width of the existing sidewalk is 5-feet. The steering committee will continue to explore the potential of replacing the sidewalk with a 10-feet wide pathway. This section of the proposed pathway would cross three driveways. The most active driveway along this section provides access to *Walgreens* at the corner of Millard and U.S. 131. However, the store has incorporated a series of pedestrian-friendly elements in their parking lot, including painted walkways and an expanded pedestrian island at the intersection.

From the south-east corner of Millard, the pathway would travel west, across U.S. 131. U.S. 131 is a five-lane highway, with two south-bound lanes, two north-bound lanes and a left-turn-lane (on the north-bound side of the highway). The intersection is currently equipped with push-button pedestrian crossing signals, ramped sidewalks and marked pedestrian crosswalks. Members of the local steering committee met with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to discuss ways to make the intersection more pedestrian friendly and explore opportunities to secure funding for possible improvements.

Potential Pathway: Millard Road/US 131 Intersection - The pathway would travel west, across US 131. The intersection is currently equipped with push-button pedestrian crossing signals, ramped sidewalks and marked pedestrian crosswalks. In choosing the Millard (rather than Broadway) crossing, the pathway will pass near a Dairy Queen, a tremendous amenity to any pathway user.

Potential Pathway Improvements - The potential view of a proposed pathway location near the Medical Center. A larger image (and current view) can be found on the *Appendix K* page of this document.

Potential Pathway: Millard Road- The pathway would replace the existing sidewalk along Millard Road, (see below). Pedestrian pathways already connect the sidewalk with the entrance to Walgreens.

Phase II. U.S. 131 to Roberts Road

From the southwest corner of the intersection, the pathway would continue west, along Millard, (in the location of the existing sidewalk) until the second parcel owned by Fabius Township. From this point, the proposed pathway would continue south and west along the edge of several large parcels owned by the Beal family, until it reached the property owned by Meijer. From this point, the pathway would travel west, through a portion of the Meijer property, back onto the Beal property, to the distinctive tree-line. From this point, the pathway would continue west along the tree-line of the Beal property for about (.75 miles). From this point, the pathway would continue west, through the existing forest area located on the Bamberger and Pashby properties, to Roberts Road.

Potential Pathway: Millard Road- The pathway would continue west, along Millard until the second parcel owned by Fabius Township, where it would then head south.

Considerations & Options

A fire-station currently owned by Fabius and Park Township sits on a parcel owned by Fabius, Park and Lockport Township. The three jurisdictions have jointly provided fire-protection services to the three communities for over 50 years. Last year, Lockport Township withdrew from the cooperative arrangement. As a result, the three jurisdictions are currently working through mitigation to sort through and settle their assets, including the parcel. Until this issue is resolved, it may be difficult to locate the pathway on this parcel. In addition, questions remain on whether a 10-foot wide pathway would fit between the fire station and the home on the neighboring property (see second picture above).

Potential Pathway: US 131to Roberts Rd. - From the fire-station, the pathway would continue south and west, along the Beal property to the Meijer property. From this point, the pathway would head west along the tree-line, through the Bamberger and Pashby properties to Roberts Road.

The steep topography along portions of the tree-line areas of the Beal property may present some challenges for pathway development. The steering committee will need to explore grading and infill considerations to make this portion of the pathway universally accessible. At the same time, the topography near this proposed portion of the trail would provide some of the best views of the surrounding area.

The Beal property is currently used to cultivate corn. The Beal family has indicated that in the short term, they would like to continue to use their property for agricultural purposes. Therefore, the portion of the pathway that would traverse directly across their property (connecting the Meijer property and the tree-line) would need to be developed in a way to accommodate large farm equipment. At the same time, efforts would be needed to develop the pathway in a manner that would minimize farming & recreational conflicts. Steering committee members have expressed interest in developing signage along the pathway that would highlight the technical aspects and cultural benefits of agriculture within the community.

This portion of the proposed pathway would require the participating jurisdictions to secure easement agreements with three private property owners and the Meijer Corporation. As previously discussed, during *Step Three* of the planning process the local steering committee talked and met with several of the aforementioned land owners. The Beal family (owners of the largest property in this segment of the proposed pathway) initially expressed support for the pathway concept and a willingness to explore future options. The Pashby family expressed support for the pathway concept and even met with the city engineer to discuss preferred pathway locations and other design considerations. At this time, the Bamberger family has not expressed support for the proposed pathway. The Meijer Corporation expressed support for the pathway and articulated interest in providing a pedestrian link from their store & parking area to the proposed pathway.

Option II. From the southwest corner of the intersection of US131and Millard, the pathway could continue west, along Millard to Roberts Road. Local officials would need to explore whether a 10-foot pathway easement would fit within the road-right-of-way. In addition, there appears to be some steep slope issues near Roberts Road.

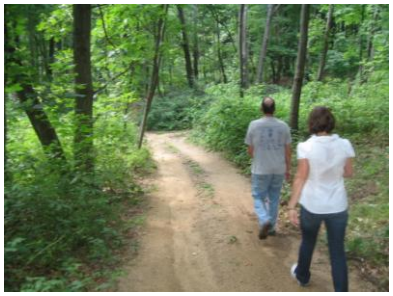
Considerations and Options - The topography of the proposed trail may require some grading and infill to accommodate universal accessibility. However, it does provide for some spectacular views. Large portions of the Beal property are used to grow corn. Efforts will need to be made to mitigate farming and recreational conflicts.

Option III. The pathway would continue west, from US 131 and Millard intersection, along Millard and connect with an "outlot" owned by the Beal Family. From this location, the trail could head south and along the tree-line of the Beal property.

Option IV. From the southwest corner of the intersection of US 131 and Millard intersection, the pathway could continue south, along U.S. 131. to the Meijer property, where it would turn and head west. Option three would locate the pathway across several commercial driveways, increasing pedestrian/vehicle conflicts. The pathway would also be fairly close to U.S. 131 and its associated noise and traffic. In addition, local officials would need to secure an easement for the pathway from the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT).

Option V. If the local steering committee and participating jurisdictions are unable to secure an easement agreement from the Bamberger family, the proposed pathway would traverse south through the forest area on the Beal property to Broadway Road. There are several dirt access roads within this area that could help establish a corridor for the pathway. From this point, the pathway would run west along Broadway, by way of an easement. The local steering committee is continuing to explore the feasibility of securing an easement in this area. Waste Management owns the last parcel before the Roberts Road/Broadway intersection. Therefore, the trail easement would only go through two private properties (Bamberger and Scott). However, there may be some issues with grading and infill if the pathway is placed in this area.

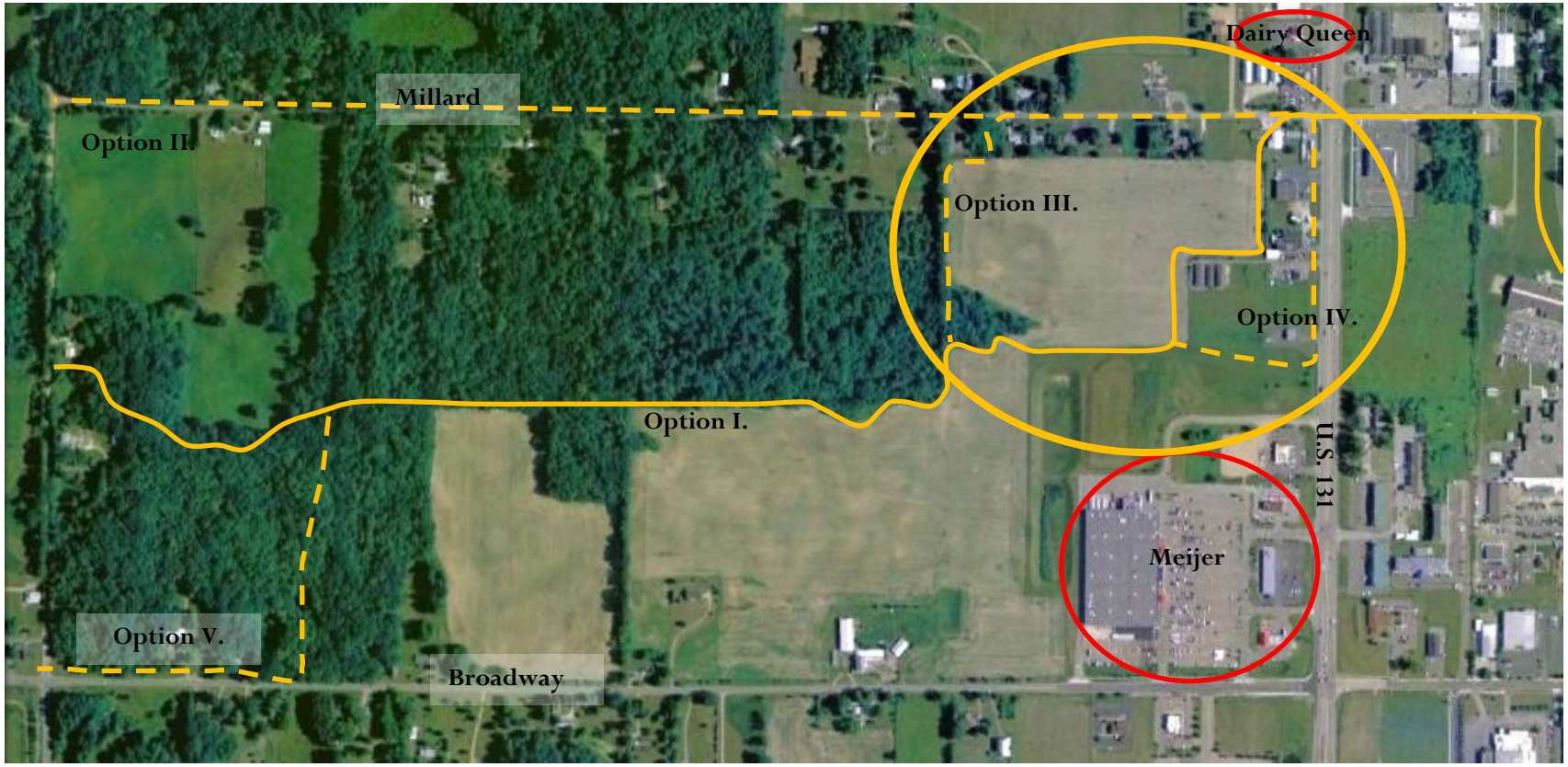
Considerations and Option V. Portions of the pathway would continue south, through forested areas of the Beal property to Broadway. From this point, the pathway would continue west by way of an easement along Broadway.



Considerations and Option III. - The potential view of a proposed pathway using the "Beal outlot" parcel. A larger image (and current view) can be found in the *Appendix K*.

Considerations and Option IV. - The proposed pathway would continue south along US 131 through an easement from MDOT.

Phase II. U.S. 131 to Beal Property



Phase III. Roberts Road to Meyer Broadway Park

From the Pashby property, the pathway would cross Roberts Road and head west into Meyer Broadway Park and the parking area. Meyer Broadway Park is a 149 acre park located on Broadway Road, just west of Roberts Road. Park facilities include a large playground, picnic pavilion, modern restrooms, a sand volleyball court, an 18-hole disk-golf course and a ½ mile paved trail. The park also features a tubing hill, cross-country ski trails and many acres of natural areas. The park is currently owned by the Waste Management Company and leased to St. Joseph County. The parking area makes for an ideal trailhead, providing access to parking, shelter, restroom facilities and water. In addition, several trails (paved and un-paved) run throughout the park.

Primary Connection - The proposed pathway would end at Meyer Broadway Park. The park has a number of amenities that support pathway users, including: a pavilion (shelter); a pop-machine; restrooms; parking, water, bike-racks and other non-motorized pathways.

Considerations & Options

Placing the pathway over Roberts Road would require the local steering committee to work with the St. Joseph County Road Commission. The Road Commission has expressed initial support for the concept. Roberts Road is a dirt road and there is quite a bit of vegetation between the road and the parking lot at Meyer Broadway Park.

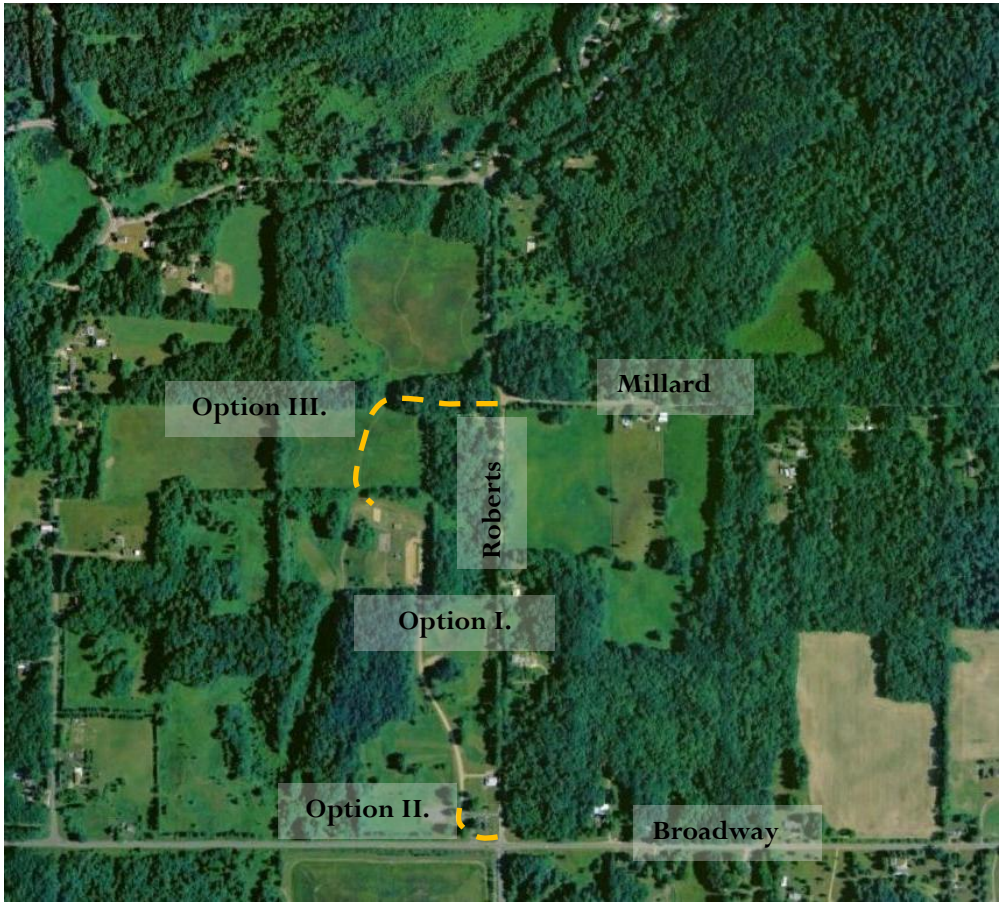
Option II. - If the pathway was located along Broadway (see Option V. from the previous section), the pathway could utilize and cross at the intersection. A cross-walk would provide a more visible crossing for pedestrians. The north-east parcel of this intersection is owned by Waste Management. Therefore,

Phase III. - Roberts Road to Meyer Broadway Park. The proposed pathway would cross Roberts Road near the Pashby property or along the utility easement along Broadway (see 2nd picture below).

perhaps the local steering committee could work with Waste Management to create an interesting, safe and pedestrian friendly corner that would help establish a formal crossing for the intersection.

Option III. - If the pathway were located along Millard (see Option II, from previous section), the pathway would cross Roberts Road, into the park, and connect with existing park trails network.

Phase III. Roberts Road to Meyer Broadway Park



Chapter Three. Action Plan - Moving Forward

This chapter outlines a series of action strategies to achieve the goals of this plan. The action strategies outlined in this chapter were established by the steering committee after considerable discussion concerning the most logical and practical way to establish a non-motorized pathway between the Three Rivers Medical Health Center and Meyer Broadway Park. It is important to note, that the development of this pathway (as with most pathways) will take considerable time and effort. It will be the completion of many small, incremental steps that will help realize the dream of the pathway.

Action Strategy One. Utilize the Memorandum of Understanding

One of the first things the steering committee should work on is getting property owners to sign the Memorandum of Understanding (*MOU*). The *MOU* is a non-binding agreement between the steering committee and individual property owners that demonstrates property owners have been contacted and expressed interest in exploring the development of a non-motorized pathway on their property. The *MOU* was developed in response to early conversations with property owners who expressed concerns about exploring the potential development of a pathway before neighboring property owners were in agreement. The *MOU* is designed to demonstrate consensus and mutual understanding between like property owners along the proposed route. A copy of the MOU can be found in *Appendix A*.

Action Strategy Two. Explore Formal Opportunities for Collaboration and Continue to Work Together

As previously mentioned, the development of this pathway will take considerable time and effort. Ultimately, the successful implementation of the pathway will depend on the continued collaborative efforts and commitments of the steering committee and project partners. At the conclusion of this planning effort, the project partners pledged to remain engaged and explore opportunities for collaboration.

In the future, the project partners may want to discuss the creation of a more formal, inter-governmental body capable of both raising the necessary funds and providing for the construction, operation and maintenance of the pathway. A chart illustrating the different state statutes that allow for and support multi-jurisdictional cooperation for recreation, including a summary of the *Metropolitan District Act* and *Recreational Authorities Act* can be found in *Appendix B*.

Opportunities for Collaboration - In addition to the recreational state statutes listed in *Appendix B*, there are a number of state acts that allow jurisdictions to collaborate on a number of topics, including recreation. One act that might be appropriate for the Three Rivers Community is the *Inter-Municipality Committees Act* (Act 200 of 1957). The act allows two or more jurisdictions to establish a formal inter-jurisdictional committee for the purpose of studying issues of mutual interest and concern and formulate recommendations for review and action by their member governing bodies. Among other things, the act allows the committee to accept gifts and grants from governmental agencies, private individuals and, foundations and other community agencies to further the objectives of the committee. A copy of the act can be found in *Appendix D*.

Action Strategy Three. Continue to Explore Other Pathway Options
The preferred and alternative pathway options expressed in this document were established by the steering committee after careful consideration of several factors including the results of the walking audit, property ownership, physical obstacles, road and driveway crossings, the potential need for easements, existing land use, natural features and the potential proximity to other pedestrian links and community assets. However, it is important to note that these are only pathway options and will require adjustments as conditions change and funding opportunities arise. For example, the steering committee may want to consider a pathway that utilizes the railroad corridor and the Township parcel south of Broadway. A copy of the easement used to develop the Cities Riverfront Trail can be found in *Appendix C.*

Action Strategy Four. Implement Phase I.
During the planning process, the steering committee identified three primary segments (or phases) of the pathway. Among other factors, the three segments were categorized based their perceived ease and opportunity for implementation. In an effort to move the pathway project forward, the steering committee and the project partners should work together to develop Phase I. of the pathway - the Three Rivers Health Medical Center to U.S. 131. Representatives from the Health Center have already demonstrated a commitment to help develop the pathway. The steering committee would need to explore the feasibility of expanding the existing sidewalk infrastructure along Millard Street. At a minimum, Phase I. would provide a link from the Health Center to the existing pedestrian infrastructure on Millard Street and connections to the City's Riverfront Trail. In addition, Phase I. would create a visual presence and demonstrate to citizens a commitment to future pathway development in the community.

Action Strategy Five. Continue to Meet with Land Owners
The preferred pathway options illustrated in Phase II. and Phase III. will require the steering committee and the project partners to secure several easements from property owners. Recent discussions with some property owners revealed reluctance to a pathway located on their property. At the same time, many property owners revealed they would be willing to discuss and explore the pathway concepts in the future. Discussions with property owners during the planning process revealed concerns with how a new pathway would affect crime and property values. However, research shows that pathways (or trails) can actually reduce crime and increase property values within a community. Additional research and information addressing these issues can be found in *Appendix E.*

Action Strategy Five: Continue to Meet with Land Owners - In addition to concerns about safety and property values, property owners expressed concerns about how an easement would affect their rights (i.e., who would be liable, who owns the easement, etc…). There are several different types of ways property owners can convey land (fee simple, easement). One type that has been discussed in this planning process is a "conservation easement."

A conservation easement is a voluntary agreement that allows a landowner to limit the type or amount of development on their property while retaining private ownership of the land. The easement is signed by the landowner, who is the easement donor, and the oversight agency (project partners), who is the party receiving the easement. The oversight agency accepts the easement with an understanding that it must enforce the terms (i.e. pathway and liability) of the easement in perpetuity.

Among other benefits, a conservation easement allows landowners to receive a federal income tax deduction for the easement - if it is perpetual.

- Little Traverse Conservancy

Learn more in *Appendix J*

Action Strategy Six. Develop Additional Capacity

As the steering committee and project partners continue to work toward the development of the proposed pathway, it will be important for members to develop additional capacity in regards to pathways and pathway development. This document, especially the *Appendix*, is designed to provide additional information on a wide spectrum of issues related to pathways. However, it will be important for the steering committee to research other resources and to consult with experts as needed.

Action Strategy Seven. Develop a Name for the Pathway

Once the final location of the pathway has been established, the steering committee and the project partners should establish a formal name for the pathway. A name for the pathway will help identify the project for the community and it can be used in promotional materials and publications. The steering committee may find that naming the pathway (or segments of the pathway) after a specific property owner or funding source may help to finalize property agreements and secure funding.