

Downtown trail to be city's legacy to Olympic torch run

Construction under way; most of trail to be finished in time for Olympic torch arrival, parks director says

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Two-thirds of a new downtown recreational trail should be ready in time for the Olympic Flame's Dec. 20 arrival in Niagara Falls, with the remainder of the trail ready next spring, the city's parks director says.

"We're gearing up, aggressively, to be completed a week or two before we're actually a (celebration) community and the 20th is our torch run," said Denyse Morrissey, head of the parks recreation and culture department.

Work started this week on the first section of the Olympic Torch Legacy Trail between Queen Street and Morrison Street, along with a small park near city hall that will host an inukshuk statue, a traditional Inuit rock statue and the symbol of the 2010 Winter Games in Vancouver.

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The trail will be the city's "legacy project" to commemorate the Olympic Torch run which is passing through Niagara Falls in late December on its way to Vancouver for the start of the games in February.

"(For) all the celebration communities, something that was highly encouraged, ...

was to have some kind of legacy project," Morrissey said.

Niagara Falls used the occasion to build a downtown recreational trail, nearly a mile long, along the old Canadian Pacific Railway corridor the city purchased nearly 10 years ago.

The total budget for the trail is \$264,000. Touchstone Site Contractors won the contract to build the first section and the parkette. Stevensville Lawn and Garden won the tender to do the section between Morrison and Bampfield Avenue, which is expected to start soon. With continued good weather, contractors should finish both sections of the trail before Dec. 20, Morrissey said.

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A tender for the last section, from Bampfield Avenue almost to Roberts Street is expected to be issued in January. By next spring joggers, walkers, and cyclists will be able to use travel the 1.3-kilometre trail from Queen Street almost to the northern edge of the tourism area at Bender Street.

Because Niagara Falls is a "celebration community" along the torch run, festivities here are expected to be a little grander than in other communities like Fort Erie and Niagara-on-the-Lake that are "route communities."

Morrissey said it's important to have the area near city hall completed by mid-December because it's going to be the area for the torch-relay festivities.

"Our goal, at a minimum, will be to have that bit of the trail done and we'll at least have the inukshuk in place to correspond with this torch run being here," Morrissey said.

The trail will have an asphalt surface, making it accessible to people in wheelchairs or scooters as well as parents pushing strollers.

City staff will monitor how the trail is used. If people who live downtown are using it to get to work in the Clifton Hill and Fallsview tourism areas, the city could consider plowing snow from the path, Morrissey said.

The Olympic Torch Relay has been under way since Oct. 30 when it arrived in Canada after being lit at Greece's Mount Olympus, the ancient home of the Olympics. The torch was in Truro, N.S., Tuesday, working its way west to Vancouver.

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