

## Downtown trail to commemorate Olympics, city officials say

### Trail could connect downtown and Clifton Hill, provide recreation for downtown residents

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Niagara Falls could have a new recreational trail, running along the old Canadian Pacific railway corridor connecting the downtown area and Clifton Hill by the end of the year, city officials say.

The city's moving forward with its plan for \$364,000 trail where the trains used to run, said Denyse Morrissey, the city's parks, recreation and culture director.

She outlined plans to build a 1.3-kilometre trail parallel to Ontario Avenue and Palmer Avenue during a downtown committee meeting Monday

"This is a fantastic amenity to move from Point A to Point B," Morrissey said.

It would be a recreational trail for people who live in the downtown area, would create a link between downtown and Clifton Hill and clean up an abandoned rail corridor, she said.

The community recreation trail would have an asphalt path for cycling and walking, similar to the Millennium Trail, the two-kilometre trail that runs along the hydro canal between McLeod Road and Lundy's Lane.

The completion of the new trail could be timed with the Olympic torch run for the 2010 winter games in Vancouver. Niagara Falls is a "celebration community" on the torch run, meaning it has a higher profile than some of the communities the torch will pass through on its way to the winter games in Vancouver. The Olympic committee encourages cities in that category to create a "legacy project" to commemorate Canada's hosting of the games, Morrissey said.

It would also have a small park at the north end near city hall, with an Inukshuk figure, the symbol of the Vancouver Olympics.

The project was already in her department's capital budget for 2009, so it could be designated as the city's legacy project, Morrissey said.

If construction of the trail starts by August, it should be completed in time for the Olympic torch's arrival in Niagara Falls, Dec. 20.

"We probably have to start by mid-August to get this done by mid-December," Morrissey told committee members.

Mordechai Grun, the chairman of the Downtown Business Improvement Area board, called it "a nice trail," but said people pushing to revitalize downtown had been "thinking of a much bigger picture" in terms of a link.

"This is just too far for the average person to walk," Grun said.

The downtown board and the new Crosslink Harbour group, which is planning an outlet shopping mall north of Bridge Street, are considering some kind of motorized transportation link between downtown and Clifton Hill. It would operate independently of the people mover system the city has been trying to develop for the tourism areas, Grun said.

There's enough room in the railway corridor to fit an asphalt pathway and leave room if Grun's idea for a motorized transportation system materializes, Morrissey said.

"Both projects could co-exist and complement each other. It's not one or the other," she said.

"It's great we're finally doing some kind of trail development," said Coun. Victor Pietrangelo.

The city has run into resistance in the past over its proposed Millennium Trail, which was planned to run about 10 kilometres along the hydro canal, creating a north-south route through the city. Only one of its five segments has been completed.

"I was pleased we were able to combine the legacy project of the torch run with the recreational needs of the community," Mayor Ted Salci said.

It's another way to connect the downtown to the traditional tourism areas.

But there are a lot of people who live downtown and work in on Clifton Hill in the Fallsview area or at the casinos. The trail would be a way for them to get to work, especially at the Fallsview Casino where cycling to work has become so popular staff have a designated area for locking up their bikes.

"We do believe this is a small step toward connectivity," Morrissey said.

Connecting downtown to Clifton Hill would require a bridge to be replaced over Roberts Street. The old train bridge was removed shortly after the city bought the railway land. It would be easy to install a prefabricated bridge because the footings and foundations from the old bridge are still in place and in good shape, said community services director Ed Dujlovic.

Canadian Pacific used to own the land and run freight trains through Niagara Falls.

The city and Ontario Lottery and Gaming bought the land from the railway company in 2001 to use it for the Fallsview casino's construction and also for the route for a future people mover system.

The section north of Roberts Street was acquired in the purchase, but never intended to be used for tourism projects.

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