

UTICA

Officials celebrate opening of Clinton River Hike and Bike Trail

By Sean Delaney

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Local and state officials gathered Dec. 15 in downtown Utica to celebrate the grand opening of the Clinton River Hike and Bike Trail, a critical link in the state's Iron Belle Trail system.

"This is not just a city of Utica asset; this is a Macomb County and eastern Michigan asset," said Utica Mayor Jacqueline Noonan, who joined representatives from Shelby Township, Sterling Heights, Macomb County, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, the Michigan Department of Transportation and the Michigan Legislature for the ceremonial ribbon-cutting across the street from the Utica Public Library on Auburn Road.

"I consider eastern Michigan to be a diamond," Noonan said. "We're where it's at, and trails like this are going to raise the quality of life in this city, the county and the region."

First proposed as a "showcase trail" by Gov. Rick Snyder in November 2012, Michigan's Iron Belle Trail will stretch across the state and link numerous existing trails to provide both a 1,259-mile hiking route and a 774-mile bicycling route. One end of the trail lies in Michigan's newest state park, Belle Isle Park (Wayne County); the other is more than 900 miles away in Ironwood (Gogebic County).

"Along the route from Belle Isle to Ironwood, Michigan's Iron Belle Trail will ultimately connect communities, provide a variety of recreation opportunities and showcase our



SEAN DELANEY — FOR THE MACOMB DAILY

Local and state officials, including Utica Mayor Jacqueline Noonan and Shelby Township Supervisor Richard Stathakis, gathered Dec. 15 in downtown Utica to celebrate the grand opening of the Clinton River Hike and Bike Trail, a critical link in the state's Iron Belle Trail system.

great state to residents and visitors alike," said Keith Creagh, director of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

According to the DNR, the 791-mile bicycle route uses existing multi-use trails that have been developed by local units of government, counties, and the state. In the Upper Peninsula, the route follows US-2, a designated national bicycling route.

The 1,273-mile hiking route follows the North Country National Scenic Trail between Calhoun and Gogebic Counties. It traverses the west side of the Lower Peninsula and borders Lake Superior in the Upper Peninsula.

In Macomb County, the Clinton River Hike and Bike Trail will link an existing trail in River Bends Park in Shelby Township to a system of trails stretching from the city of Utica to Lake St. Clair Metropark.

The cost of the trail is approximately \$2.4 mil-

lion. About \$1.8 million of that came from Federal High Priority Project funding, with an additional \$338,000 from a Michigan Transportation Alternative Program grant.

"If you didn't know, building a trail is just like building a road, only narrower," Noonan said. "Everything you have to do to build a road, you have to do for a trail. It was really expensive."

Per the Macomb County Department of Roads, the remaining costs of the project -- approximately \$533,866 -- were to be split between Shelby Township and Utica. Because construction costs are more expensive in Utica, the county estimated Utica's cost share to be 59 percent, while Shelby Township's is 41 percent.

"We really do appreciate the synergy between the city of Utica and Shelby Township," said Shelby Township Supervisor Richard Stathakis. "Not only is

this (trail) a tremendous improvement to our recreational infrastructure, but it's also a great testament to the collaboration between Utica, Shelby Township, Macomb County and all the agencies that were involved in this. I think this is a testament that when you work together, there are some great results. I appreciate all the hard work everyone has put into this."

While it took several years -- and several trips to Washington, D.C. to plead for funding -- Noonan said she's grateful for the support the project has received at the local, state and federal level.

"As a teacher, I never expected that I'd be sitting around with engineers doing everything from building tunnels to figuring out to get a railroad to do something," she said. "It took more than a village to get this project done, but we've had such excellent helpers all the way around."