

REGIONAL PLANNING NEWS

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New Executive Director

The Commission is pleased to welcome Stephanie Hacker as the agency's next Executive Director. Stephanie brings 20 years of professional planning experience to the Commission. She holds a Master's Degree in Urban Planning, with an undergraduate degree in Geography. Stephanie began her career in Illinois and Maryland, relocating to Wisconsin where she has spent much of her career with GRAEF. She has led community and economic development, planning, strategic planning, and urban design efforts, working with local governments and private sector partners to instill positive and lasting change. Stephanie has a passion for the work and a commitment to continue the Commission's efforts to address problems that transcend the corporate boundaries of Southeastern Wisconsin's local units of government. Ben McKay, who served as Interim Executive Director, will continue to serve the Commission as Deputy Director.



2 Grant to Support Climate Pollution Reduction



2 CONNECT 1 Bus Rapid Transit



3 Fabulous Fox! Water Trail



EPA Grant to Support Climate Pollution Reduction

The Commission, in close coordination with the City of Milwaukee's Environmental Collaboration Office (ECO), received a \$1 million non-competitive planning grant through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) program. This grant is funded through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and will support efforts to develop and implement greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction strategies, with an emphasis on accelerating environmental justice efforts in communities overburdened by pollution. A climate action plan funded under this program will also position government agencies in the four-county Milwaukee metro area to compete for over \$4.6 billion in Federal IRA funding to implement projects related to reducing GHGs and other harmful air pollutants.

Milwaukee's Climate and Equity Plan (city.milwaukee.gov/climate/Climate-Plan) will serve as a foundational document for the climate action planning portion of this program. The Climate and Equity Plan's 10 Big Ideas could support a wide range of implementation projects in the areas of transportation, buildings, green infrastructure, job creation, and more.

The planning effort will update and expand the City of Milwaukee's GHG's inventory, identify implementing measures, conduct a benefits analysis, and conduct community engagement with a focus on low-income and disadvantaged populations. Commission and City staffs have received statements of support from over a dozen jurisdictions and state agencies for this effort and will coordinate with a working group to help guide the planning program. The planning process is anticipated to begin this summer and conclude in 2027.



Credit: VISIT Milwaukee



Credit: MCTS

CONNECT 1 Bus Rapid Transit Service Begins

On June 4th, the Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) began service on Wisconsin's first bus rapid transit (BRT) line. CONNECT 1 provides modern transit service with reduced travel times utilizing electric-powered buses between the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center and Downtown Milwaukee. CONNECT 1's 33 stations provide next bus arrival information, off-board ticketing, and level-boarding platforms for faster bus loading and unloading along the nine-mile route. The CONNECT 1 service is free until September 30th courtesy of UMO Mobility, provider of WisGO, the new MCTS fare collection system and app.



Fabulous Fox! Water Trail

On June 2nd, Secretary of the Interior, Debra Haaland, announced the designation of the Fabulous Fox! Water Trail into the National Park Service's National Water Trails System. The 158-mile long Fabulous Fox! Water Trail was one of only nine trails across the U.S. selected as a National Recreation Trail in 2023 and joins a distinctive network of recreational water trails throughout the U.S. The trail is the 7th designated National Water Trail in the State of Wisconsin and runs from the headwaters in Waukesha County to the southern border of Kendall County, Illinois. With over 70 access points, the trail offers paddlers the opportunity to enjoy and explore vibrant Midwestern communities and varying landscapes along the Fox River. The trail includes signage and strategic infrastructure improvements to enhance water trail access will be made in the future, allowing visitors to enjoy a variety of activities such as paddling, fishing, touring historic/cultural sites, dining at local restaurants, and shopping.



The designation was established through the National Trails System Act of 1968, which made it Federal policy to recognize, promote, and increase access to outdoor recreation. The National Water Trails are a subset of the National Recreation Trails Program and were established to protect and restore America's rivers, shorelines, and waterways; conserve natural areas along waterways; and increase access to outdoor recreation on shorelines and waterways. The National Water Trails System strengthens the conservation and restoration of the waterways through the mutual support and cooperation of federal, state, local, and nonprofit entities.

Working cooperatively with the WI-IL Fox River Water Trail Initiative's Core Development Team and Map Hero (design consultant), the Southeast Fox River Partnership was awarded a WDNR Surface Water Grant to develop tools to establish the Fox River Water Trail. This grant-funded project was conducted from February 2018 through December 2020. The resultant tools, public meetings, and brochures helped to make the Fox River more accessible to visitors of all backgrounds and abilities who want to get outdoors for recreation, education, and adventure. Building on this momentum, the Core Development Team from both states applied for designation through the National Park Service in November 2022.

For more information, visit fabulousfoxwatertrail.org and www.nps.gov/subjects/nationaltrailssystem/national-water-trails-system.htm.

12th Annual Fox River Summit Date Announced

The 12th Annual Fox River Summit will be held on Thursday, March 14, 2024 in Burlington, Wisconsin. The Fox River Summit is an annual gathering of organizations, municipalities, residents, and stakeholders from across the Fox River Watershed in Wisconsin and Illinois. Every March, residents of Illinois and Wisconsin gather at the Fox River Summit to update one another on what is happening along the Fox River. This full-day event examines watershed management issues and challenges in both the Illinois and Wisconsin portions of the river basin, and is also an opportunity to celebrate the success stories along the Fox River. A key goal is to continue the dialogue between stakeholders in Illinois and Wisconsin on many topics, including recreation, economics, fisheries and other wildlife, soil health, water quality, stewardship, and other ongoing activities to improve this shared resource.

The sponsoring Fox River-based organizations strive to continue these collaborative efforts in the watershed. The Fox River Summit is where everyone in the watershed comes together to share challenges and successes. Commission staff, in partnership with the Southeast Fox River Partnership, Fox River Study Group, Friends of the Fox River, and Fox River Ecosystem Partnership, and with the continued support/funding by the Southeastern Wisconsin Fox River Commission, has helped establish, coordinate, and host every Fox River Summit since its inception in 2013. For more information, visit southeastfoxriver.org.



September Try It! Challenge with CommuteWISE

The first annual CommuteWISE challenge for Southeastern Wisconsin will focus on helping commuters try a new way to get to work! The Try It! Challenge will take place during the month of September and will aim to reduce congestion, improve air quality, and build community by encouraging individuals to explore alternative modes of transportation for their daily commutes such as walking, biking, carpooling, or using public transportation. Participants will be encouraged to log their commutes on the CommuteWISE Connect platform (connect.commutewise.org/#/) to be eligible to win raffles for local prizes and gift cards. Businesses can form teams and encourage their employees to register and participate.

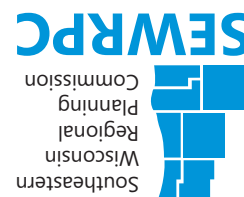
Did You Know?

The Wisconsin Chair Company, founded in the 1880s in Port Washington, Wisconsin, surprisingly became a pivotal organization in the blues music movement in the U.S. As the record industry started growing, the Wisconsin Chair Company began making phonograph cabinets to hold record players. To help sell these cabinets, the company included recorded music, records, or phonographs, which then led to the company producing records and creating their own record label, Paramount Records.

Paramount began by recording ethnic music directed toward Germans and Scandinavians in the Ozaukee County area. Eventually the company moved to recording blues music in a newly built barn-like structure in Grafton. This music genre attracted well-known blues artists such as Louis Armstrong, Ethan Waters, Ma Rainey, Charley Patton "The Father of the Delta Blues," and many other artists who are now viewed as the founders of the American Blues sound. Paramount Plaza in Grafton recognizes some of the talents who recorded at Paramount Records.

*Source: Spectrum News 1 (Maddie Burakoff)
and Wisconsin Historical Society*

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