

US 23 Heritage Route

Marketing Committee Meeting Notes

Monday, July 15, 2024 at 2 pm

Location: Alpena City Hall



Present:

1. Anne Belanger (Presque Isle County)
2. Doug Baum (NEMCOG)
3. Denise Cline (NEMCOG)
4. Jared Cline (NEMCOG)
5. Eli Lindbert (NEMCOG)
6. Montiel Birmingham (City of Alpena Planner)
7. Mary Beth Stutzman (Alpena CVB)
8. Mary Ellen Jones (Alcona County)
9. Rich Castle (Develop Iosco)
10. Clayton Sigmann (MDOT – Byway Program)
11. Angela Addington (Allegra)

Call to Order:

Anne Belanger called the meeting to order at 2 pm. Each member introduced themselves.

Dark Skies:

The committee discussed the importance of promoting the dark skies of the area. Mary Beth Stutzman discussed the designated Dark Sky Preserves along the route and explained the process for designation including required legislation and resolutions. She indicated that there are dark sky photos and videos available to use for promotion. The committee discussed the option of having dark sky promotion of sites that are not specifically designated and the promotion of the area as the Dark Sky Coast. Recommended lighting standards should be developed and distributed. Mary Beth has sample ordinances that can be reviewed. She also indicated the importance of having businesses open after hours for dark sky tourists to obtain services and restroom facilities. Rich Castle noted that management of sites being promoted as dark sky viewing areas should be consulted to ensure that it is feasible and permissible to promote after-hours use of each site.

Marketing Committee Recommendation:

1. Identify sites along the route that can be promoted as Dark Sky Viewing Areas.
2. Work with site management to ensure sites are ready for dark sky use.
3. Identify businesses nearby that can provide nighttime amenities to visitors.
4. Create a dark sky tour on the website.
5. Use dark sky imagery and video on the website.
6. Promote best practices for lighting standards for local communities.

Name of Route:

Denise Cline gave a brief history of route naming. The route began as the Sunrise Coastal Highway then changed to Huron Shores Heritage Route. Eventually, it was simply called US 23 Heritage Route. The “Sunrise Coast” came about during a Pure Michigan branding effort for the Pure Michigan campaign along the route. In the past, MDOT was OK with the route still using the name “Heritage Route” after the rebranding of the MDOT program to Pure Michigan Byways, so the route kept that name. However, Sunrise Coast is used now on MDOT promotional materials and in some of the US 23 promotional materials. The group recommended that “Sunrise Coast” be used instead of the

words “Heritage Route”. Clay Sigmann indicated that the website URL wouldn’t have to change, but new URLs would redirect to the current site. Denise Cline noted that she felt the cost to make this change is not prohibitive.

Marketing Committee Recommendation:

1. Change the words “Heritage Route” on the logo to “Sunrise Coast”.
2. Start using Sunrise Coast brand on promotional materials.
3. Purchase domains using the words “Sunrise Coast”.
4. Trademark new logo

Signs:

Denise Cline read the group and email from Keven Schaedig of MDOT about route signage. The message indicated that the US 23 group could design a sign to replace the current Pure Michigan Byway signs. The US 23 group would have to cover the cost of the design and fabrication of the signs and MDOT would have to approve it. The signs are 24”X 24”. Once we have a design drafted, MDOT could tell us fabrication costs. The new logo signs would be designed with the Sunrise Coast brand. Denise noted that the only sign using “Heritage Route” that is on the route currently is at the Standish Depot.

The committee also discussed the need for directional or interpretative signage along the route. This would include signs which indicate that an attraction is a primary stop within the US 23 program. The group decided that a signage plan is necessary to determine where signs are needed, what type of signs are needed, and the costs involved.

A related conversation occurred concerning the history of the Byway program and Pure Michigan. Rich Castle also discussed Iosco County and the possible promotion of US 23, M-55, and River Road.

Doug Baum noted that MDOT’s Byway page indicates that the following amenities are shown as not available on US 23: natural beauty, hiking trails, islands, photography, bicycling, fishing, winter sports, family fun, wind and cuisine, museums and galleries, and breweries. Clay said he would work on fixing that.

Marketing Committee Recommendation:

1. Design new road sign and work with MDOT for approval.
2. Secure funding for the Signage Plan.

Print Materials:

Denise Cline discussed the print materials available. NEMCOG has applied for funding to supply the Welcome Centers with guidebooks which is the material that the Welcome Centers prefer. However, small brochures are better for placement in hotels, etc. Rich Castle stated that we should survey the businesses and chambers along the route to see which they use and prefer. Denise noted that NEMCOG is currently reprinting the Blueways Paddling Atlas which is highly sought after. The Port Huron Welcome Center is the highest user of the Blueways Atlas. Denise Cline and Anne Belanger talked about the need for a Blueways video – NEMCOG has a drone operator that could assist with obtaining shots.

Marketing Committee Recommendation:

1. Survey those who distribute the print materials to determine need.
2. Continue to print all versions for now with the “Sunrise Coast” brand included.

Website:

Jared Cline has been keeping the US 23 website updated with events in addition to updating attractions and deleting attractions that closed. Denise Cline stated that she has applied for funding to do a minor upgrade to the website.

Discovery Tour:

Mary Ellen Jones gave an overview of the Discovery Tour process. There is a PowerPoint presentation that was created for a Pure Michigan conference that can act as a How-To Guide. The group discussed the need to visit each community to explain the tour and possibly do this presentation so that communities understand the “ask”. Basically, it involves getting the word out by connecting to communities, engaging in fundraising for marketing, having communities/businesses schedule events, and then making them available on the website. A Discovery Route Steering Committee is necessary to lead the process, but the committee should not be doing all of the work.

Marketing Committee Recommendation:

1. Form Discovery Tour Steering Committee.
2. Present the How-To slideshow at the next Management Council meeting.
3. NEMCOG assists by doing presentations in communities.

Legislative Tour:

This tour is focused on highlighting our program and the coastal region to legislators and VIPs. The last tour was a 2-day event. State legislators, State department heads, and other VIPs traveled caravan-style up US 23 to schedule stops. John Moolenaar was a State Senator at the time who sponsored the event. His staff worked with NEMCOG staff to organize the event. Doug and Denise will ask the staff of Michele Hoitenga if she is interested in sponsoring the event. The Senator could then bring other legislators on board.

Marketing Committee Recommendation:

1. NEMCOG will ask Senator Hoitenga about sponsorship.
2. A legislative Tour Committee should be formed to oversee the process.

Merchandise:

Eli Lindbert spoke about possible merchandising opportunities for US 23 gear that he has been working on. The group discussed coming up with unique logo items such as bicycle gear, lanyards which hold your glasses on for paddling, etc.

Marketing Committee Recommendation:

1. Gather ideas for unique logo gear.