

First steps taken for trail project

By Bernice Pontanilla
Staff Reporter

Progress is already underway on an ambitious project to build a seven-kilometre trail connecting Elmwood with North Kildonan.

A community consultation, held recently, marked the first steps in what is expected to become a well-worn corridor for pedestrians and cyclists from the edge of the city to the downtown core.

"We had between 60 and 70 people come out. I was thrilled," said Janice Lukes, coordinator of the Winnipeg Trails Association, who is working with the River East Neighbourhood Network and City officials to get the trail project going.

"The community is embracing this project, which is good to see because it's on their back doorstep."

Lukes refers to the recent purchase by the City of the former Marconi rail line from local businessman and philanthropist John Buhler, of Buhler Industries.

Buhler bought the land from Canadian Pacific Railway in September, which he sold to the City for \$1.5 million.

Buhler also donated \$150,000 towards the Marconi trail project, which the City doubled with \$300,000.

Lukes said her group and others will come up with an additional \$150,000 from private donations to meet the final tally of \$600,000 for the Marconi trail.

The community consultation covered three areas – connectivity, including the possibility of connecting this trail all the way to The Forks and north to Bird's Hill Park – surfacing, what works best for pedestrians, cyclists and other potential users – and support, bringing more people on board and developing possible fundraising activities.

At the Nov. 15 meeting, Lukes said eight people signed up to be part of the trail committee.

There have also been consultations with the cycling group Bike to the Future, added Lukes.

Molly McCracken, Bike to the Future spokesperson, said her group is very interested in seeing the Marconi trail connect to downtown and The Forks.

"Right now the Marconi line ends at the rail yards (in Elmwood) and we'd really like it to connect to downtown and The Forks," she said, adding that this way, many people would be able to cycle to work in a safe, quick manner.

"It'll be used the most because it'll be the easiest route to use (to get to downtown)."

John Kubi, a member of the River East Neighbourhood Network's trail committee and a resident of North Kildonan, said the new trail will be well-used because people of all ages in the area are becoming more active.

"It will really be a community benefit – to the health and welfare of the community," said Kubi, adding he hopes all levels of government support this project.

"We need to adapt to a world that is changing...Communities and governments need to think outside of the box, if we adopt a wait-and-do-nothing approach, that's not thinking of the future."

Lukes said her's and Kubi's groups are working hard to have the Douglas trail built and finished for 2007.

That trail, named the Chief Peguis Pedestrian Trail, runs parallel to Douglas Avenue from Henderson Highway to Raleigh Street and is expected to cost \$115,000.

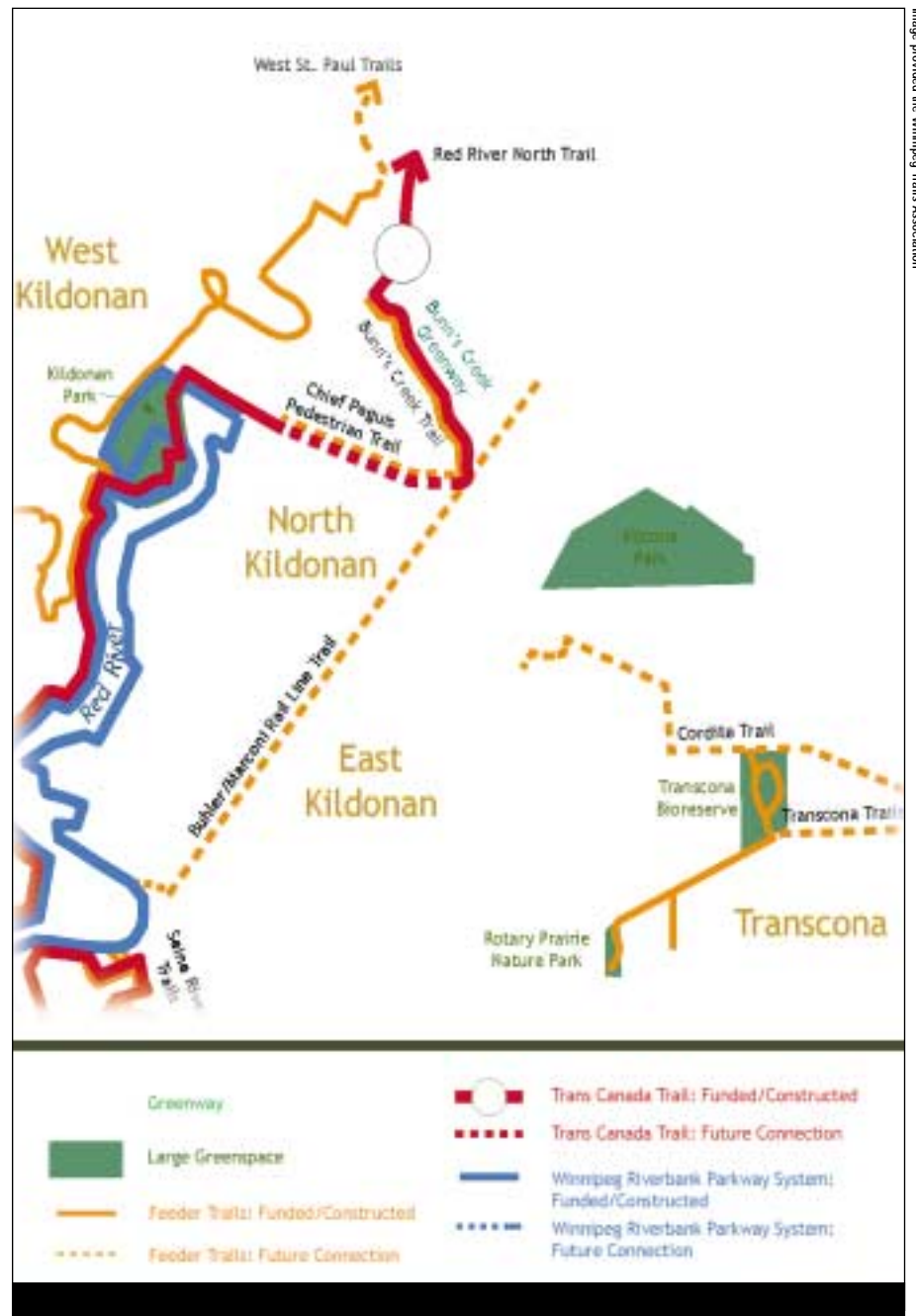
Lukes said her hopes are for a finished Marconi trail by 2008.

In fact, the City of Winnipeg would like a final plan for the trail by spring of 2007.

"People are keen on it, they're keen that the Tim Hortons is on there too," joked Lukes about the new location on Gateway Road.

"This will be a showcase trail."

Lukes said people can send their ideas and comments via e-mail to trail committee member Sigrun Bailey at sbailey@mts.net.



A Winnipeg Trails Association map shows the new Buhler/Marconi rail line.



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