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M-119 TUNNEL OF TREES SCENIC HERITAGE ROUTE COMMITTEE

DRAFT Minutes

Tuesday, April 22nd, 2025

Emmet County Building – Conference Room

3434 Harbor-Petoskey Rd, Suite A

Harbor Springs, MI 49740

Present

Dale Scott, Friendship Township (Chair)
Jerry Root, Readmond Township
Joe Tomlinson, Readmond Township
Joey Arbaugh, West Traverse Township
Lisa Fineout, Readmond Township Supervisor
Laurelynn Harris, Cross Village Township
James Fisher, Friendship Township
Franz Neubrecht, Emmet County Lakeshore Association
Garon Gopigian, West Traverse Township
Carolyn Sandford, West Traverse Township
Jim Anderson, Friendship Township
Sue Rentrop, Cross Village / Emmet County Lakeshore Association
Tammy Doernenburg, Emmet County Planning and Zoning Director
Laura Moreau, Emmet County Planning and Zoning Director
Sherry Jones, Resident
Steve Wolt, Resident
Bill Klco, Resident
Isha Pithwa, Networks Northwest

Online presence – Clayton Sigmann, MDOT; Caitlin Donnelly, Little Traverse Conservancy, Jay Galitsis (MDOT); Don Schaplowsky, Readmond Township

Absent

Naomi Singer, Cross Village Township
Larry Wallen, Readmond Township

I. Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was called to order at 9:31 by Chair Dale Scott. Attendance was recorded for those present and of online participants.

II. Review and Adoption of Minutes from October 8th, 2024

Motion by Joe Arbaugh, supported by Sue Rentrop, to approve the October meeting minutes. All in favor. None opposed. Motion passed unanimously.

III. Agenda Review

Dale suggested to add a Public Comment as item V. after Partner Reports. Moved sub-item: IV. E. i. Spring Coordinators Call discussion report and sub-item IV. E. ii. Discussion on internet access to VI. Ongoing and Unfinished Business as items i. and j.

Motion to move the agenda as presented with the suggested changes. None opposed. Motion passed unanimously.

IV. Partner Reports

- a. Emmet County Planning and Zoning (ECPZ)** – Tammy informed the group about the packets sent to property owners in 4th quarter 2024 and 1st quarter 2025. The packet includes all letter from the committee, M-119 information/educational materials, Emmet County Road map, and Emmet Planning document – zoning ordinance, Steppe slope ordinance, scenic resource zoning district section of the ordinance, etc. Tammy also updated the group that Emmet County will be embracing Master Plan Update starting May/June which is about 18 month process.
- b. LTBOI** – None.
- c. LTC** – Caitlyn informed the group that LTC is currently focused on storm cleanup efforts. They are working with partners and the county to clear trails, making them accessible and ensure safety. There were no specific updates related to M-119.
- d. MDOT** – Jay G. updated the group on the upcoming chip seal and fog seal project scheduled for 2026, which will mirror similar work completed in 2016 and approximately 10 years prior. The goal of this project is to maintain the roadway in a reasonable and perpetual condition by sealing cracks and providing a refreshed driving surface to prevent further deterioration. He noted that the road work through Tunnel of Trees is especially quite challenging given the geography. The project is estimated at \$2.6 million and was prioritized within the 20-county region. One key difference from the 2016 project is that this time maintenance work will begin earlier, focusing on repairing deteriorated and rutted shoulder areas and addressing drainage issues before chip sealing begins. These efforts aim to improve the cross-section of the road. The overall construction schedule is shorter—approximately 6 weeks—and detours will be in place, similar to standard road projects.

Regarding storm cleanup, Jay noted that the M-119 corridor was heavily impacted, but thanks to support from the Kent County Road Commission and numerous other road commissions from downstate, the route was made passable through extensive tree clearing and debris removal. Kent County's contribution was particularly significant. The group suggested sending a letter of appreciation to the Kent County Road Commission, as well as to the Emmet County Road Commission, MDOT, and the Osceola County Road Commission for their support. Dale and Laurelynn volunteered to help draft the letter.

Clayton S. – Will give updates on Coordinators call during when Isha discusses.

- e. Networks Northwest (NN)** – Isha provided a brief summary of the topics discussed during the Spring Coordinators Call. She also shared a summary sheet that included relevant links and noted that the presentation and materials have been uploaded to the website. Following the Coordinators Call, Isha introduced the budget and agenda templates provided by MDOT, which will be discussed in more detail under the "Ongoing and Unfinished Business" section. Additionally, Isha suggested the committee discuss options for ensuring internet access to

support virtual participation throughout the year – which would also be discussed later under unfinished business items.

f. Committee Members Comment –

- Appreciation to Kent County for working along the M-119 and beyond post ice storm.

V. Ongoing and Unfinished Business

- a. Adopt-A-Highway Program** – Carolyn S. updated the group on the spring pickup schedule. The committee had set the pickup dates beginning April 5, which did not work great given the storm conditions. Provided a brief history on the group working with the Lower Peninsula group for the pickup. Carolyn expressed concerns at the time, especially since dedicated volunteers Jerry Root, Joe and Jane Newberry, and herself were all affected by the timing and with a severe ice storm. Unable to reach one member due to a lack of reception and internet access, Carolyn resorted to leaving a handwritten note to advise against proceeding with the pickup. She also contacted the program coordinator downstate to explain the situation and informed them that no one would be participating in the original timeframe. As an alternative, the group may now participate in the Upper Peninsula cleanup dates, which run from May 10 to May 18. These updated dates will also be posted on the website. Carolyn will send the final notice to Isha to post online.
- b. Zoo-de-Mac – status report for May 16, 17, 18, 2025 event** – No report was received. Staff will follow up with the organizers for an update and will also remind them to coordinate with the local sheriff's office.
- c. Plans for distribution of our guidebooks, etc.** – Dale reported that he brought boxes of materials available for distribution and encouraged anyone interested to take some. Garon suggested he could take some and coordinating with West Traverse Township. Discussions on distributing materials at locations such as the post office and the Good Hart Store. Additional distribution points mentioned included the Harbor Springs and Petoskey welcome centers (both local and MDOT-run), as well as the bike trailhead kiosk (noted by Carolyn). Dale offered to coordinate further and asked that anyone interested in distributing materials contact him by phone or email.
- d. Review Fiscal Year 2025 Work Plan Budget and revise** - The committee reviewed the approved FY2025 Work Plan Budget, which was included in the meeting packet.
 - i. Revise website costs as suggested by MDOT (\$400) (See FY25 Work Plan Budget Attached Pages 13-16)** - Isha informed the group that, following a conversation with Clayton, it was clarified that website hosting fees (i.e., currently allocated \$400) should be covered under administrative costs rather than the planning budget. She asked the committee whether they would prefer to reallocate the website maintenance funds to another activity, or retain the line item as-is and focus on minor improvements to the existing website—such as rearranging content for better usability, minor redesigns and uploads, updating the homepage to highlight upcoming events, and improving the site's visibility in search engine results. Dale asked the group if there were any damages to current signs due to current ice storm. None reported. The committee decided to retain the website line item and proceed with minor updates and reorganization. Going forward, the group agreed that hosting fees paid to LIAA will be reimbursed through

administrative costs unless additional expenses are incurred, such as a full redesign or other significant changes which fall under planning activity.

- ii. **Update on Signage maintenance report** - Isha reported that she has not yet received an update on the signage work that was scheduled for completion in fall 2024. Dale shared that, according to Naomi, her son—who was contracted to complete the work—was unable to do so in the fall, and the work remains yet to be done. Once it is completed, an update will be provided to the group. Isha reminded the committee that the work must be completed and invoiced by September 30, 2025 to be fiscally constrained as is in work plan. She also noted that she has not received any formal contract or documentation to date, Dale will follow up on the contract/document.

e. Begin work on Fiscal Year 2026 Annual Work Plan and Budget. Need done at 5/25 Mtg –

- Dale asked the group to begin thinking about potential activities that could be funded with the FY2026 budget. He noted that he has not yet received any suggestions and encouraged members to begin listing ideas to prepare for the upcoming fiscal year. Isha responded by suggesting that the group start by reviewing the existing Management Plan to identify any goals or objectives that have not yet been completed. She recommended prioritizing those unfinished items as a foundation for planning the FY2026 budget. Dale asked if any members would be willing to form a subcommittee to work on this review. Isha clarified that the subcommittee's role would be to review the Management Plan, compile a list of outstanding planning activities, and help inform future budget planning.
- Dale, Garon, and Jim volunteered to form this subcommittee also contacting Naomi to join. Isha recommended that this group serve as a standing committee, continuing to review the Management Plan on an ongoing basis to track progress and maintain an updated list of recommended planning activities. This would support more efficient work plan and budget development in future years. Discussions around naming this standing committee. Discussions around expanding and describing what planning and management activities would be like – identifying issues on corridor and solutions on that, feasibility studies, analysis, it could be a list that involves everything. The current subcommittee would be continuing to review existing management plans to ensure that the group compiles activities outlined already in the document.
- Clayton asked whether the group would like to print additional guidebooks for distribution at MDOT Welcome Centers. The group determined that no additional printing is needed at this time, as there are sufficient extra copies available, and some can be shared with Clayton.

Motions related to the discussion and conclusions above:

Motion by Dale S., supported by Garon G. to establish a standing committee for the ongoing review of the Management Plan and identification of future planning and management activities called "Sub-committee A". All favored, none opposed. Motion carried.

- Dale invited the group to share ideas for activities that could be included in the May 2025 meeting discussion to help shape the FY2026 budget. James Fisher suggested considering signage improvements following any potential chip seal work. Carolyn proposed planning an educational component for FY2026, such as a symposium or a community-focused

event—possibly involving tree specialists or other relevant speakers to engage the public and raise awareness. Dale encouraged members to email him any additional ideas or details they would like to see included in the discussion.

f. MDOT – Byways Workshop in Gaylord 11/4/24 and Byways Spring Coordinators Call – Report from attendees. –

- Dale asked the group to share thoughts on the events from the people who attended. Garon replied he attended and liked the part where there were attendees who enabled themselves as an open resource on anything needed. Most of the people on that call were members dedicated to helping this program and at the end there was a roundtable etc. which was helpful. Discussions noted that there were also list of things to market the program which was nice to look at the things like reviewing byways map, photo collection of byways for advertising, etc.
- Carolyn S. responded with a reminder that M-119 is a unique corridor that already receives significant visitor traffic. She expressed concern about promoting it further, stating the preference is to "preserve and protect" rather than "market". She emphasized that increased tourism—particularly from motorcycle traffic—can harm the experience the committee is trying to protect. Clayton acknowledged that perspective and clarified that marketing doesn't always mean tourism promotion—it is more as to serve purposes like safety education and preservation messaging in this context. He encouraged the group to consider marketing as a broader tool to support the corridor's goals, not just to attract more visitors.

Isha's Summary and Materials: from both spring coordinators call and Gaylord Workshop

- Isha presented a printed summary of the workshop and highlighted key items discussed, including grant opportunities and major takeaways such as the America 250 initiative. She informed the group that the full presentation and resources are available on the website. Clayton elaborated that America 250 represents a unique, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to tell the local story and engage with broader national efforts.

Agenda and Work Plan Templates:

- Laurelynn raised a question regarding the source and authority behind the agenda and work plan templates provided by MDOT, particularly questioning whether Masons or another formal parliamentary authority was used. Clayton responded that the Pure Michigan Byways Program was established through legislation, which authorized MDOT to set the rules.
- Isha clarified that Laurelynn's specific concern was about the parliamentary authority behind the structure of the agenda and work plan templates. Clayton confirmed that the templates are modeled on Robert's Rules of Order and should be adapted in accordance with each committee's own bylaws. Discussion continued around how these templates apply locally.
- Isha reminded the group that these templates were originally discussed during the Spring Coordinators Call and are included in the packet for review. She stressed that the M-119 Byway Committee currently does not have any known bylaws, or at least no active

members have a copy, and emphasized the importance of creating bylaws moving forward.

- Dale noted that further discussion on these templates and committee governance would be taken up under the final agenda item, “H. Administrative Items,” which includes review of all those items.

g. Appoint new Committee Chair, Vice Chair & Treasurer beginning on 10/1/25.

- Dale noted that he has served as Chair for the past two years and that, currently, the committee does not have formal bylaws. He opened the discussion by asking how leadership appointments were handled in the past and whether anyone would be interested in stepping into a leadership role for FY26.
- Carolyn S. recalled that, at one point, there was an informal practice of having township representatives rotate into the chair role alphabetically. Dale asked if that process was documented anywhere. Carolyn noted that Naomi, might know more, but she was not present. Dale stated he had previously asked Naomi about this specific topic, and she indicated that no written procedure exists.
- The group discussed whether there might be something in past meeting minutes, but no one could recall seeing a formal record. Isha asked for clarification about who is eligible to chair under the alphabetical rotation—whether it applies only to townships or includes other partners like Emmet County. The group responded that the rotation was only intended for township representatives.
- Clayton S. suggested forming an executive committee that could include representation from Emmet County. This smaller body could help nominate or recommend leadership positions.
- Carolyn expressed a preference for simplifying the process, recommending that meetings return to being fully in-person and that each township appoint a representative. She suggested, for example, that Readmond Township could take the Chair position and West Traverse Township could serve as Vice Chair, following a simple, informal rotation without the need for a complex structure or subcommittees. Dale mentioned that the group tried reinstating that in past.

h. Administrative discussions - Bylaws; Agenda and Work plan template; Sub-committees; Potential letterhead; Internet Access.

- Bylaws: Following the earlier conversation, Tammy from Emmet County shared that her department has access to historical documents related to the committee. She offered to review these materials and collaborate with Dale, Carolyn, Naomi, and others with longstanding involvement to identify anything that could clarify current practices. The findings will be brought back to the full committee.
- Agenda Template – Isha mentioned it is not mandatory – Asked Clayton to clarify and explain them to the group. Clayton went through the templates and each items briefly along with the sub-committee items. He explained that subcommittees referenced in the template are intended to make recommendations to the broader committee. For example, a subcommittee focused on recreation could include members from the Emmet

County Parks and Recreation Department. Clayton also discussed typical agenda components such as business items, public comments, and reporting. This is what MDOT is recommending for effective meetings and to make it more standardized.

- Work Plan Template: Clayton then reviewed the updated work plan template. Most changes are technical in nature and request more detailed information. He provided a brief overview of these revisions and how they might be applied.
- General Discussion: Dale reminded the group to keep the committee’s mission front of mind—preservation of heritage, culture, environmental resources, and scenic viewsheds. He emphasized the importance of deciding how complex the committee wants its structure and operations to be. With that, the group concluded the administrative discussions and moved on to the next agenda item.

VI. New Business

a. Report from discussions surrounding possible parking/restroom/pull-off area along TOT

- Dale S. opened the discussion. The committee is not interested in being directly involved in creating facilities such as restrooms or parking lots. If such projects move forward, they would fall under the jurisdiction of other entities. The committee’s focus remains on preservation, environmental protection, safety, heritage, and cultural values along the corridor. A simpler organizational structure is preferable. Clayton S. shared that while the byways program can support projects like restrooms or parking, the responsibility lies with local governments—such as townships or the county. However, he noted that if the project aligns with the goals in the Corridor Management Plan (CMP), the byway committee can help support it through grant opportunities, letters of support, and technical assistance.
- Dale S. said he plans to review the management plan more thoroughly in the coming month to better understand what’s currently included.
- Additional group discussion noted that letters have already been sent to neighboring townships along the corridor to gauge interest in developing a joint Parks and Recreation Plan. The goal of this plan is to identify potential parks, natural resource amenities, and recreation infrastructure needs—including restrooms—based on community input. The process is in the early stages, and a planning firm has been contacted to lead the effort. The plan would align with Michigan DNR’s requirements to qualify for grant funding. No specific locations or decisions have been made yet, but the plan is expected to be completed before February 2026. Dale S. asked whether township supervisors had received the letter; the response indicated that letters were sent recently.
- Garon G. added that he attended a Zoom meeting where the discussion largely focused on the need for a restroom near Good Hart, especially during peak summer months. He noted this is primarily an issue affecting Cross Village and Readmond Townships. He suggested a temporary solution, such as placing portajons for a couple of months, to address the need without creating long-term maintenance obligations.
- It was noted that there is currently no dedicated funding for ongoing restroom maintenance.

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- Laura M. proposed a short-term solution of setting up a temporary parking area with porta-johns during peak season. She asked whether this would align with the committee’s mission of preserving heritage, scenic view sheds, and ensuring safety. She pointed out that the problem has been clearly identified—overcrowding, improper parking, and lack of restroom facilities—and asked how the group intends to address it. Tammy D. reiterated that identifying potential locations and needs is precisely what the Parks and Recreation Plan aims to do.
 - The group briefly discussed existing public restroom availability in nearby locations, including businesses such as the Good Hart Store.
 - Dale concluded by asking if there were any further comments. None were offered, and the discussion was closed.

VII. Public Comment

- Clayton S. asked the group about the committee’s current relationship with local destination marketing organizations, such as the Petoskey Area Visitors Bureau. He inquired whether such organizations are involved with the committee and suggested considering their engagement. The group responded that they are not currently in contact with the Visitors Bureau and have no interest in marketing.
- Clayton S. clarified that involving a marketing organization could support safety and education initiatives—such as promoting “Share the Road” campaigns or visitor etiquette messaging—rather than tourism promotion.
- Dale S. said the committee might be open to distributing some of its educational pamphlets through these channels.
- Laura M. emphasized that “marketing” should be rethought as “outreach,” not necessarily to attract more visitors, but to communicate the committee’s goals and raise awareness about safety, preservation, and respectful visitation.
- Sherry J. voiced support for using outreach as a tool for protection and preservation, not crowd attraction. She expressed concern over adding a restroom facility, noting the 25-mile stretch between Harbor Springs and Cross Village and 7 miles from store distance. She commented that if local stores need additional parking for their customers, they should be using properly zoned business properties to accommodate that. She noted that the Good Hart Store has recently closed off its porta-johns to the public due to being overwhelmed. She stressed that any outreach or messaging from the committee or tourism organizations should focus on the scenic, historical, and preservation-based nature of the Tunnel of Trees
- Tammy D. added that as the committee begins preparing its 2026–2027 Corridor Management Plan update, it may want to consider removing references to food and restroom stops on the plan map.
- Bill K. mentioned that an M-119 sign is missing just north of Island View.
- He also shared that he and his wife run the Good Hart Artist Residency, and that on August 21, they will once again host the “Heart Trail,” a one-day event along M-119

featuring independent artists. He clarified that the event does not involve roadside parking or additional traffic concerns and simply wanted to bring it to the committee's attention.

VIII. Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 11:26. Next meeting on June 10, 2024 Readmond Township - 6034 Wormwood Ln, Harbor Springs, MI 49740 at 9:30 AM.