

AARP: Fitchburg Greenway System plan wins AARP's Small Dollar, Big Impact grant

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FITCHBURG, WI – A proposal submitted by Bike Fitchburg, Inc. to designate a new “Fitchburg Greenway System” has been selected to receive this month’s AARP Wisconsin “Small Dollar, Big Impact” grant.

The City of Fitchburg has a network of over 36 miles of multi-use paths for all ages and abilities. However, there has been no prior effort to document and promote this network as an active transportation system. The \$1,000 grant from AARP Wisconsin will be used to buy brackets, posts, and signs, which will be installed and maintained by the city as part of an officially designated “Fitchburg Greenway System.”

AARP Wisconsin is awarding one grant each month throughout 2022 to projects across the state that are designed to improve communities and make them better places for everyone to live, work and play as they age. Judges selected this project after reviewing dozens of proposals submitted from all over the state.

“These grants are exactly what the name describes – short-term, low-cost solutions that could have remarkable impacts on the shaping of neighborhoods and cities,” said Darrin Wasniewski, Associate State Director of Community Outreach for AARP Wisconsin.

“When reviewing submissions for June, the judges immediately hit on Bike Fitchburg’s application as one that epitomized the spirit of Small Dollar, Big Impact,” Wasniewski said. “Starting with an idea that rolled into a demonstration pilot, we hope this project will affect larger policy change in the city for the benefit

of all its residents, but especially those who are 50 and older. We look forward to seeing Bike Fitchburg's plan come to reality."

"We are so grateful to AARP Wisconsin for its generosity and confidence in our plan," said Tony Hartmann, president of Bike Fitchburg, Inc. "This demonstration project is just the catalyst we need to help the community understand the potential of our path system, which is already built and currently maintained by city staff."

The City of Fitchburg has agreed to include the greenway system in its five-year Park and Open Space Plan Update. "Our plan is for the city to designate the system, develop a master plan, and provide signage for people walking and on bikes," said Steve Arnold, treasurer for Bike Fitchburg. The system will then be promoted through city, community, and business publications as well as bicycle maps and the media.

Identification and wayfinding signs will be purchased and installed at a busy intersection serving one of Fitchburg's disadvantaged neighborhoods. The intersection, at Traceway Drive and S. Fish Hatchery Road, is directly in front of the HighLine Senior Apartments and so will encourage those 55 and older residents to stay active and engage in with their community.

"Installing signage at this initial 'demonstration' intersection will show the public and elected officials how the whole system will look when fully built out," according to Arnold. "We hope the demonstration garners support for developing the entire system as a community asset."

The Fitchburg Greenway System signs, maps, and publicity will help residents without cars walk or ride bikes to many destinations that meet daily needs, such as jobs, stores, library, day care, senior center, medical care, parks, and city hall, and other places that are not reachable by public transit. Bike Fitchburg will work with the Chamber of Commerce and city officials to publicize transportation opportunities to residents in the area.

Bike Fitchburg – an all-volunteer bicycle advocacy organization – presented the plan for the overall greenway system to the city's park commission and bicycle committee, which unanimously approved the concept and directed parks staff to move the project forward.

For the entire system, the city's neighborhood navigators (part-time staff hired from

the Healthy Neighborhood Initiative areas) will poll resident on what way-finding destinations are important to them: retail, city hall, parks, etc.

“Bike Fitchburg works with the mayor, council, and city staff to make bicycling of all kinds easier, safer, and more fun in Fitchburg,” Arnold said. “We work to expand and fill gaps in our safe and comfortable active transportation network, including multi-use paths, cycle tracks, and quiet neighborhood streets for users eight to eighty years old. We approach our work through an equity lens, directing the most effort to the areas with the greatest need.”

AARP Wisconsin’s launched its “Small Dollar, Big Impact” grant program in 2020 and is now in its third year of helping proposed projects move forward in rural and urban parts of the state.

“This project fits perfectly with the spirit and intent of the Small Dollar, Big Impact grant program,” Wasniewski said. “Our goal is to support communities as they make positive changes that inspire long-term progress on livable issues. This proposal hits that nail right on the head.”

The grant program is open to some nonprofits and government entities. For more information on the program, visit www.aarp.org/WIsdbi