

The Blue River Trail Expansion



***A Project of
The Columbia City Parks Department
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Welcome to Columbia City

Columbia City is a small, friendly community located in Northeast Indiana. It has both a long, rich heritage and a bright promising future. It is a community sharing a commitment to continuous growth and quality of life-style. Columbia City and its surrounding areas are home to some of Indiana's fastest growing manufacturing, technological and service-based businesses as well as expanding and new residential developments.

As the County seat of Whitley County, Columbia City is home to nearly 8,000 residents. State Roads 9, 109 and 205 traverse Columbia City, linking it to communities such as South Whitley, Churubusco, Albion, Huntington and Wolf Lake. A major east/west highway, US 30, bisects Columbia City. The downtown area, Morsches Park, the vast majority of the Blue River Trail, Peabody Public Library, YMCA and the new Parkview Whitley Hospital campus are all situated on the south side of US 30.

For more than a decade, Columbia City has enjoyed growth and development in and around the community, much of which has taken place on the north side of US 30. Due to the location of US 30, the newly developed areas north of the highway are completely cut off from downtown area. US 30, a heavily traveled, four-lane highway, is dangerous for pedestrian traffic to travel on and across. Travel from the north side of US 30 to the south side should only take place in a motorized vehicle, limiting accessibility to the community and resources on both sides of the highway.

The Columbia City Park Department and Blue River Trail

The Columbia City Parks and Recreation Department offers a variety of recreational facilities and activities through 8 different parks and the Blue River Trail. The mission of the Department is to provide, maintain, and enhance the quality of our community by effectively managing the use of recreational programs, facilities, natural spaces, and leisure opportunities.

Morsches Park is the Parks Department's main recreational area and the location of most of our sponsored activities. Located on the west side of Columbia City, it is bounded by the Blue River on the east, and the City's corporate limits on the west. The Park's only entrance comes off of West Van Buren Street (State Road 205). Morsches Park is approximately 130 acres in size and offers a variety of team-oriented recreational activities including baseball, softball, skating, football, soccer and basketball. It also offers more individual-oriented sports such as tennis and shuffleboard. Non-competitive recreational activities available at Morsches Park include nature trails, camping, picnicking and playgrounds. The

pavilion is often used for anniversaries, reunions, company picnics, and hog roasts.

A full scope of the amenities at Morsches Park include skateboard park, one acre pond, nine mile off-road wooded bike trail, camping, four restrooms, splash pad, two concession stands, picnic tables, four open air pavilions, nature trail, enclosed pavilion, four t-ball fields, soccer field, playgrounds, four tennis courts, football fields, three shuffleboard courts, six baseball/softball fields and the northern length of the Blue River Trail.

The Blue River Trail is an existing, mixed-use trail that follows the Blue River from Whitley Street through Morsches Park and under US 30. The original 2.25-mile stretch from Whitley Street through Morsches Park and to Columbia Shores housing subdivision began development in 1993 with a transportation grant in the amount of \$500,000. In 2001, a second length of trail was added. This section extended the trail under US 30 and north of the highway approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ mile. This phase of the project also included a loop around the Morsches Park pond and an off-road trail to the Irish Glenn housing subdivision. The Recreational Trails Program funded this extension of The Blue River Trail with a grant in the amount of \$82,049. In total, the trail is 2.5 miles, one-way, and provides access to the local YMCA, Peabody Public Library, and the many amenities of the Park. The northern loop of the trail passes under US 30 and extends approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ mile north of the highway, along the east side of the Blue River. Since the trail, and Morsches Park, are under the highway and link the north and south sides of US 30 in a safe and continuous property, it creates the opportunity to link the Blue River Trail with parts of Columbia City that are geographically disconnected from community resources by the east/west thoroughfare of US 30 and the north/south flow of the Blue River.

Project Need and Development

The Columbia City Parks Department has embarked on a project to lengthen the existing Blue River Trail, expand greenways and increase access to Morsches Park. A volunteer committee made up of residents and representatives from the area north of US 30 and west of the Blue River was created to assess the need and opportunity for the Blue River Trail to expand. The committee identified the housing communities in the immediate area and the number of residents living there.

Situated on the north side of US 30, in the immediate area of west of the Blue River, are a mobile home community, a shopping center, a housing subdivision, a mixed income housing development that offers lease to buy options for low-income families, two senior living communities, and three apartment complexes. The population of this area is a little over 2,000 people – approximately 25% of

the population of Columbia City! Expansion of the Blue River trail to these residents would dramatically improve accessibility to Morsches Park, downtown Columbia City, the YMCA, the library, the proposed new community center and the new Parkview Hospital campus, while supporting physical wellness and extending the amount of mixed use trail for *all* residents of Columbia City and Whitley County.

The expansion project includes an additional 4,020 feet, or $\frac{3}{4}$ mile, of trail and a pedestrian bridge. The bridge will connect from Morsches Park on the east side of the Blue River to a wooded edging of an agricultural field on the west. The Whitley County Drainage Board will donate the land for the bridge to the City. The estimated value of this land will count toward our required match of \$37,500. Once over the Blue River, a connecting trail will be developed. This trail will travel south, along the river, creating a river greenway, for approximately 1,300 feet. A private landowner will donate the land for the trail to the City. The estimated value of this land is also eligible as matching funds. As the new trail approaches US 30, it will adjoin an existing utility corridor owned by the City. A linear corridor will be created for the use of the trail that is 2,720 feet in length. Finally, the trail will connect to an existing ten-foot wide asphalt path in the Countryside Shopping Center and end as the trail meets Countryside Drive.

The proposed trail expansion consists of 8' wide crushed limestone path with finished edges. Engineering Resources, Inc created a Preliminary drawing for the pedestrian bridge. The design is for a pre-cast, double-t bridge. The concrete structure is made in Decatur and brought to the site on a flat bed semi. A crane then lowers the structure in to place. The bridge will not require any piers in the water. It will connect to the elevated earth on either side of the river with helical piles. The cement bridge and steel bar railings will require no long-term maintenance making it an ideal selection for the Parks Department budget.