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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Natural Trail at Grand Traverse County's Civic Center Park

Traverse City—Following a fast-paced collaborative effort, a new natural trail shadowing the paved pathway at the Grand Traverse County Civic Center in Traverse City has been developed and is ready to welcome walkers, runners, hikers, and bikers. The new Civic Center Natural Trail is a dirt path that parallels the outer edges of the approximately one-mile, existing paved pathway, which is used by hundreds of walkers, runners, and cyclists every day. The natural trail is approximately one mile long and 2.5 feet wide. Partners responsible for forging the path are Traverse City Track Club (TCTC), TART Trails, and Grand Traverse County Parks and Recreation, which stewards the Civic Center. According to TCTC Executive Director Lisa Taylor, "This trail is designed to offer users a more forgiving, underfoot surface, versus pavement, and offers less impact due to the natural grass and dirt surface." The trail may be accessed at any point within the park, Taylor explained, and is clearly visible due to its very low-mowed grass and pink flag markers. At certain locations, the trail transitions back to the paved path, but otherwise continuously follows the outer edge.

The idea for a natural trail at the park resulted from a meeting among County Parks and Recreation Director Kristine Erickson, TART Trails Planning and Management Director, Chris Kushman, and Taylor, while discussing options for improving the existing asphalt path as part of a larger master site planning process for the entire Civic Center property. Just two weeks after the Parks and Recreation Commission passed a motion to add the natural trail at no cost and on trial basis, TART and TCTC staff and volunteers developed the new course, now ready to be inaugurated by runners during TCTC's monthly Trail Run Series on October 17. According to Taylor, the collaborative effort to build the softer trail was a "labor of love." The project, she said, "clearly aligns with each of our organization's missions, and we are thrilled to offer in-town walkers, runners, hikers, and cyclists a trail experience similar to those offered at the many trailheads just outside of city limits."

A precursor to master site planning for Civic Center Park in 2020, the natural path is a temporary amenity, according to Erickson. Its level of use will be monitored and considered when the master site planning process for the park begins next year. Erickson explained that in May, County Parks and Recreation Commissioners passed a resolution to develop a master site plan for Civic Center Park because, said Erickson, "it receives approximately one million visitors annually, and the layout and some of the facilities and green spaces are outdated to the point where they no longer serve their highest and best uses for all." She is optimistic that a new master site plan for Civic Center Park will "ensure its future as THE hub of recreation in our county." Once a firm is selected to develop a master site plan, the entire community will be invited to develop a new blueprint for its beloved park.

In the meantime, a new natural trail located in town is ready for use. Invitations to test the trail are being extended to area cross country teams, the Grand Traverse Hiking Club, Northern Michigan Mountain Bike Association, and Norte, which is headquartered at Civic Center Park. Special events put on by TCTC, including a Fun Run and Third Thursday Trail Series, will offer guidance on accessing and using the trail.

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