

# Suburban Life

MAGAZINE

## **First Avenue Bike Path Finally Becoming a Reality | By Jeff Tobolski | July 24, 2014**

There has been talk about constructing a path along First Avenue from Riverside-Brookfield High School to 26th Street in North Riverside to provide a safe route for students to walk and bike to school since 1968.

However, it has been just that; talk. For whatever reason, previous local officials and bureaucrats could never agree on how to get the project off the ground, and so it fell by the wayside. Year after year, students continue to walk through the forest preserves on a footpath trail that they have created themselves, and bike along busy First Avenue.

Over the past several months, I have been meeting regularly with presidents Hugh Hermanek of North Riverside, Ben Sells of Riverside, Kit Ketchmark of Brookfield, and officials from the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), the Cook County Forest Preserve, Friends of the Forest Preserve, and Riverside-Brookfield High School. For the first time everyone truly is on the same page and ready and willing to work together.

I am happy to report that Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle has recently committed to providing a \$100,000 matching contribution to the funds that Riverside, North Riverside and Riverside Brookfield High School have already committed.

With these funds, the plan is to complete the first leg of the path – from the west side of First Avenue from Ridgewood Road to 31st Street – by the end of the year. The second phase of the project would be to continue this trail from 31st Street heading north along Golf View Road to 26th street. I asked state Sen. Martin Sandoval, D-Cicero, to attend our monthly meeting to see if he could assist us. Sen. Sandoval has committed to helping us find the \$600,000 in Springfield to complete this project. We are grateful for his help, and the additional support from the state could be a game changer. It is our goal to begin this phase of construction next year.

The final phase of this project is to connect the Salt Creek Trail. After the 31st Street bridge was rebuilt over Salt Creek, it included a sidewalk, but apparently no one followed up to create a path to connect it to the trail, leaving many to dub it the “Bridge to Nowhere.” Connecting these trails would be a huge benefit to our residents and bicycle enthusiasts.

In the span of months we now have project specifications, cost estimates and most importantly, funding commitments. All of this would not be possible without the hard work and dedication of our local officials and relevant agency employees.

At a time when so little seems to be getting done by our federal government it is refreshing to see local governments and agencies working tirelessly on a long stalled project that will help our residents and students tremendously.

*Jeff Tobolski is mayor of McCook and Cook County commissioner for District 16*