Rock Island Trail meeting Jan. 20 at Scenic Regional; 'assessment' session afterward at Owensville City Hall

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Missouri State Parks will be hosting a Jan. 20 public meeting from 5:30 to 7 p.m. at the Scenic Regional Library in Owensville, followed by an assessment meeting for city, county, and state officials at Owensville City Hall.

Rep. Bruce Sassmann of the 62nd District said on Tuesday that the second meeting is not meant to be open to the public.

"If people have something to offer, they won't be turned away," Sassmann said. "Missouri State Parks is interested in meeting with key individuals to discuss resources along the trail. Communities and counties could detail readiness to the public.

Sassmann said there may be more persons present than he is aware. According to a letter sent out by Meramec Regional Planning Commission's Director Bonnie Prigge, the mayors of Belle, Bland, Owensville, Rosebud, and Gerald have been invited.

"Maybe spokespersons for school districts who want to apply for safe routes to schools grants (in conjunction with the cities)," Sassmann said. "Mayors may have invited school officials for those who plan to participate."

Missouri State Parks may have advice for trail communities who want to begin developing their own sections of the trail.

"State Parks is treating the Rock Island as different sections of a trail," Sassmann said. "Eastern and western sections will be treated differently and tunnels and bridges will be their own thing."

A second assessment meeting has been scheduled to take place in Eldon in conjunction with Missouri State Parks and Rep. Willard Haley, 58th District, following the Jan. 18 Versailles public meeting.

No assessment meetings are scheduled following the Jan. 25 meeting in Freeburg, located in the central portion of the Rock Island Trail.

"State Parks would have to be engaged as a partner in an assessment meeting," Sassmann said. "We will gauge how future assessment meetings might go (after the first meeting)."

Gasconade R-2 implements new COVID plan, test-to-stay option on hold due to supply shortages

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Area school districts were expected to implement board-updated COVID-19 response plans following their return to classes after the Christmas break last week. Instead, they have been slammed with a shortage of Test-to-Stay kits and new COVID-19 guidelines.

The Gasconade County R-2 School District returned to classes on Jan. 5 expecting to implement a new Safe Return to School Continuity Plan passed on Dec. 20 by the board of education. The board also supposed to mark the beginning of an optional Test-to-Stay Program. The program allows students exposed to the virus at school, but are without symptoms, to access free testing kits that would allow them to avoid isolation. The Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) has announced a shortage in kits as COVID-19 numbers are on the rise with the new Omicron variant.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) advised Gasconade County R-2 officials on Jan. 6 to reserve the kits for staff members.

Gasconade County R-2 Superintendent Dr. Jeri Kay Hardy mentioned both DHSS and DESE recommendations.

Gasconade R-2 is operating under DESE advice to only use test kits for staff due to the shortage. That does not mean that a student or staff member with symptoms will not be sent home even with a negative COVID-19 test.

"If we have to test you, that means you are exhibiting two or more symptoms," Hardy said. "Under EBB wellness policy, violation, you have to go home until your symptoms begin to improve. Or if you go to the doctor and find another way to explain your symptoms. If the doctor says the reason you have a runny nose and headache is because you have allergies, you get to come back. If you have strep, you get antibiotics and the symptoms get better, come back."

Hardy further explained a DESE email home until symptoms subside. Originally we could use the tests on asymptomatic students also. Now if they have to test, they are sick and they are under policy EBB and they have to stay home until the symptoms go away."

EBB is not a new concept.

"Last time EBB was updated was May 21, 2012," she said. "This is the same policy we would use for the flu and things like that. We use it for kids. We have used it with staff members that were exhibiting symptoms. But there is not a big demand for it."

If Test-to-Stay kits are available parents also supposed to mark the beginning of an optional Test-to-Stay Program. The program allows students exposed to the virus at school, but are without symptoms, to access free testing kits that would allow them to avoid isolation. The Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) has announced a shortage in kits as COVID-19 numbers are on the rise with the new Omicron variant.

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