DODGE COUNTY
WISCONSIN

Dodge County
Land Resources & Parks Department

127 East Oak Street · Juneau, WI 53039-1329
PHONE: (920) 386-3700 · FAX: (920) 386-3979
EMAIL: parks@co.dodge.wi.us

★ GOLD STAR ★
MEMORIAL TRAIL

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 11, 2026

Contact: Bill Ehlenbeck
Dodge County Land Resources & Parks Director
Phone: (920) 386-3960
Email: behlenbeck@co.dodge.wi.us
Website: www.dodgeparks.com

GOLD STAR MEMORIAL TRAIL PHASE 2 SET FOR 2027 CONSTRUCTION; FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED FOR MEMORIAL MONUMENT AND TRAIL

JUNEAU, WI — Dodge County officials and the Gold Star Memorial Trail Committee have officially announced that construction for Phase 2 of the Gold Star Memorial Trail (GSMT) will take place in 2027, with a ceremonial groundbreaking planned for late 2026.

Phase 2 will construct a 2.3-mile, 10-foot-wide paved multi-use path running parallel to State Highway 33 from the City of Horicon westward to the Wild Goose State Trail. Designed for year-round, non-motorized recreation, including biking, hiking, running, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing—the off-road trail will provide a safe alternative to traveling along the busy State Highway 33 corridor, which carries over 5,200 vehicles daily.

The decision to advance Phase 2 follows a rigorous evaluation of construction bidding and project economics. In summer 2026, formal construction bids yielded higher-than-expected costs due to broader market inflation which especially hit trail construction materials and labor.

Faced with a significant financial shortfall, county leaders and project advocates evaluated whether to delay the project or move forward. To protect a secured $1.1 million Federal Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) grant and a $260,000 Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Stewardship grant, the Dodge County Board voted to move forward after a rebidding effort confirmed market costs for a 2027 construction timeline. Northeast Asphalt, Inc. of Fond du Lac was the selected contractor to carry out Phase 2 Trail construction. Moving forward ensures these critical federal and state investments remain locked into Dodge County to deliver a high-quality, safe trail for its residents and visitors, rather than forfeited for similar projects elsewhere.

"Protecting our federal TAP grant and state stewardship funding was paramount," said Bill Ehlenbeck, Director of the Dodge County Land Resources and Parks Department. "By approving a construction contract now and scheduling construction for 2027, we safeguard nearly $1.4 million in outside funding while protecting against further inflationary cost increases that could have derailed the entire project."

The Gold Star Memorial Trail originated over a decade ago as a grassroots initiative led by Mayville-area residents seeking a safe off-road route between Mayville and the Horicon Marsh Education and Visitor Center. Driven by overwhelming regional support, the project expanded into a planned 15-mile trail network linking Mayville, Horicon, Beaver Dam, the Wild Goose State Trail, and Horicon Marsh. Phase 1 (connecting Mayville to the Horicon Marsh) and Phase 4 (City of Horicon road routes) opened in 2019 to widespread public acclaim.

Beyond its recreational and economic benefits, the trail fulfills a solemn request from local Gold Star families to serve as a living memorial to Wisconsin military service members killed in action. The route honors local and statewide heroes fallen in major conflicts. Special inspiration for the trail is driven by 6 fallen since 1991 from the

communities to be connected by the trail: Private Michael L. Fitz (Horicon), Sergeant Kirk Allen Straseskie (Beaver Dam), Lance Corporal Ryan J. Cantafio (Beaver Dam), Specialist Michael Jacob Wendling (Mayville), Private First Class Jacob A. Gassen (Beaver Dam), First Lieutenant David A. Johnson (Horicon).

To offset construction inflation costs and bridge the construction cost gap, the Gold Star Memorial Trail Committee of the Friends of Dodge County Parks have joined forces with the Beaver Dam Area Community Foundation to launch a major community fundraising campaign. With over 2/3 of the funding already raised, a final push for the remaining amount is targeted by Memorial Day, 2027.

In addition to offsetting construction inflation, the fundraising campaign will support the development and installation of a permanent Gold Star Families Memorial Monument. This national monument will feature commemorative markers and dedicated reflection areas, providing a tranquil, solemn space for families, veterans, and visitors to honor the fallen and acknowledge the enduring sacrifice of military families. Wisconsin is one of only a couple of States without this national monument.

"This trail is a promise kept to our Gold Star families" said Glenn Daily, President of the Friends of Dodge County Parks. " Bringing this national monument to Dodge County alongside the trail would be truly special and further our commitment to remembering and honoring our fallen and the sacrifices of their families. We are calling on foundations, local businesses, civic organizations, residents and everyone else to join us in bringing this project across the finish line."

Tax-deductible contributions to the trail project and Memorial Monument can be made to Gold Star Memorial Trail Fund, Beaver Dam Area Community Foundation, P.O. Box 721, Beaver Dam, WI 53916 or online at www.beaverdamacf.com. Donations to the project can also be made to Friends of Dodge County Parks, Inc., P.O. Box 72, Juneau, Wi 53039 or www.goldstarmemorialtrail.com or Venmo Friends of Dodge County Parks, Inc. - @FODCPI.

For additional trail, monument or fundraising information, please visit www.dodgeparks.com, www.goldstarmemorialtrail.com or contact Dodge County Land Resources and Parks Department at (920) 386-3700.

The Gold Star Memorial Trail is a collaborative public-private initiative led by Dodge County, along with the Friends of Dodge County Parks, and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. When fully complete across its five planned phases, the 15-mile trail network will connect Mayville, Horicon, and Beaver Dam, offering first-rate non-motorized recreation, economic, tourism, and lasting military remembrance benefits.

###