

TC Summer Buzzwords

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Construction. Festivals. Water. These are some of Traverse City's hottest summer buzzwords. To help you plan for the months ahead, *The Ticker* takes a look at the latest news and developments on all three fronts.

Construction

One of the biggest construction seasons in recent memory – for both road work and development – means residents and tourists can expect traffic delays this summer. But new growth means new dollars coming into the community, with local crews working hard to get projects finished on or ahead of schedule.

On Thursday, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) announced the **reconstruction** of US-31 from Holiday Road to Three Mile Road was finished two weeks earlier than planned. “We knew from the planning stages of this badly needed project that construction would cause some inconvenience...so we worked with Elmer’s to minimize those effects as much as possible,” says Rick Liptak, Traverse City Transportation Service Center Manager for MDOT. “We’re so pleased that we can reopen this road fully as the summer tourism season ramps up.”

Across town, reconstruction work continues on at least two other major corridors: West Front Street from Hall to Division Streets, a project **scheduled** to last through July 3, and LaFranier Road, an **overhaul** from Barlow Street to Hammond Road expected to continue through July. Out in Acme Township, meanwhile, workers will be busy through September building three roundabouts and a pedestrian tunnel at M-72 and Lautner Road, part of the **new Meijer complex** expected to open in early fall.

On the development front, downtown Traverse City could look significantly different in just a few months’ time as major mixed-used developments begin to take over vacant or underutilized plots. A proposed \$50 million **redevelopment** of the Park Place Hotel and surrounding properties could break ground as soon as this fall, as could Federated Properties’ five-story, mixed-used **development** at 124 West Front Street. Federated also has conceptual plans for an eight-story development at 145 West Front, while kitty-corner to those parcels, developers are targeting a nine-story, mixed-used development on Pine and Front. Just around the corner, the long-awaited Hotel Indigo is **slated** for a fall opening. “This is probably one of the most active times I can remember with all the development going on,” says Grand Traverse County Deputy Director of Planning and Development Jean Derenzny. “I think right now the economy is right. With the different financing packages available, things seem to be loosening up for the developers.”

Festivals

While the National Cherry Festival and Traverse City Film Festival are expected to draw

their usual huge crowds – and plenty of food and beverage **events** will also give the area a boost – many have their eye on a festival newcomer this summer: the Great Lakes Equestrian Festival.

After reaching a **settlement** to take over the four-week July window previously occupied by Horse Shows by the Bay, Stadium Jumping's Matt Morrissey has been off to the races attracting sponsors and participants for his new event. "We expect to be sold out at least two weeks and are very happy with the other two weeks," Morrissey says. "We have strong participation. Our goal is to get the basics down this year, and then expand and add more events next year."

Morrissey says the public can attend the festival for free Wednesdays through Saturdays, with a ticketed showcase event – complete with kids' programming – taking place each Sunday. Late July weeks will include live music and entertainment. "We've gotten a great response from the community so far," says Morrissey.

Water

Does your favorite beach look a little smaller this year? You're not imagining things: Lake Michigan water levels are six inches above average this year, and 2.5 feet higher than they were two years ago, flooding a significant portion of the shoreline.

Executive Director Christine Crissman of The Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay notes that system snow combined with cooler water temperatures and Grand Traverse Bay freezing over – all of which reduce evaporation – contributed to the rise. While higher levels can pose erosion issues, Crissman notes the flux also benefits water-based creatures, who can find "good habitat for feeding and reproduction" closer to shore.

Crissman's organization will be monitoring more than just water levels this summer: Watershed is set to begin its weekly testing for E. coli this month at over 20 area beaches and lakes, a process that continues through Labor Day. While the organization publicly posts its results and closes beaches when levels are elevated, Crissman notes most spikes are rain-related and naturally dissipate within a day or two. Don't want to take any chances? "A good rule of thumb if you want to be safe...is to wait a little while after a big storm event before you go swimming," Crissman says. "99 percent of the time, the levels are back to normal the next day."

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