

**RAIL TRAIL CONVERSION ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**Town of Sudbury, Massachusetts**  
**Minutes of Meeting on August 10, 2006**

**Present:** Pat Brown, Betty Foley, Madeleine Gelsinon, Bob Hall, Bridget Hanson, Sigrid Pickering, Jennifer Pincus, Bill Place, Dick Williamson, Carole Wolfe.

**Absent:** Dennis Mannone, Eric Poch, Nancy Powers

**FST representative:** Jennifer Shemowat

**Also present:** Selectman Bill Keller, Dave Duane of Methods Machine Tools and resident Jim Nigrelli

**Public Comments**

At 7:40 P.M. Pat Brown invited comments from the public. Dave Duane of Methods Machine Tools, an abutter of the proposed rail trail wanted to go on record saying that the trail would be a disaster to his company, mainly for safety and security reasons. The trail would cross a major entrance to the facility that is used by customers and heavy trucks. Trucks and children he said are not a good mix. There are two blind spots on the entrance road that increase the risk of accidents. The buildings are also open all through the working day for ease of operation, including doors in the back, and the presence of a trail only 25 feet away poses a significant security risk. Sigrid Pickering inquired whether the type of trail might mitigate the situation, and the reply was no, it would not. The business is generally open from about 6:30 A.M. until 7:30-8:00 P.M. during the week and until noon on Saturdays. Bill Place noted that there are similar concerns with several other businesses, such as Cavicchio's, whose entrance roads cross the trail. Jen Shemowat indicated she would be talking with all of the businesses that are trail neighbors.

**The meeting was called to order at approximately 7:50 P.M.**

**Past Minutes:** With one small addition the minutes of the July 13 meeting were approved.

**Points of Information:**

Dick Williamson reported on several happenings affecting the development of rail trails in Massachusetts. (1) He distributed a copy of a memorandum from state representative Anne Paulsen regarding the fate of two pieces of legislation important to trail development. The first was the override of the governor's veto of the section of the Economic Stimulus bill that would give municipalities matching grants for the purchase of environmental liability insurance, which would effectively cap Sudbury's liability at \$50,000. The second listed the appropriations for trails and trail research in the Economic Stimulus Act, the FY07 budget and the FY06 supplemental budget, sizeable appropriations for 16 trails and walkways around the state. (2) Dick noted that he had attended a charette in Marlborough in which participants discussed ways of incorporating the Assabet River Rail Trail into town life. (3) He also reported news that a developer in Wayland has committed to donating \$250,000 to the town to be used in developing the east-west (Wayside) trail. He was asked what relevance that had to the proposed Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) in Sudbury. The east-west trail will connect with the BFRT in south Sudbury making Sudbury the hub of an important trail system if both trails come to pass. (4) Dick distributed a notice of a presentation by the Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS) to the Framingham Board of Selectmen (BOS) on August 22. There will be a discussion afterwards of a letter of intent for the town to begin negotiations with the owner of the right of way (CSXT) to purchase it. The committee agreed that the Sudbury BOS and Town Manager should be notified of these developments so that they can respond appropriately. (5) Finally, Dick reported that the towns of Acton, Carlisle and Westford will

join under Acton's aegis in sending out an RFP for the 25% design of the BFRT in those three towns. The RFP should be approved and released soon.

**Old Business:**

Pat Brown asked the committee if it wanted to operate with her as the only chairperson following the resignation of Dick Williamson as co-chair at the last meeting. She indicated her willingness to do so. She also indicated there was no immediate need for the committee to decide; the decision could be made at the next meeting.

Pat also indicated that she was looking for volunteers for several upcoming tasks. One is for someone to write a short article for the Annual Town Report.

A second need is for someone from the Conservation Subcommittee to write a proposal to the BOS requesting CPA (Community Preservation Act) funds for a three-season environmental study that might not wait on approval of funds for a 25% design. Selectman John Drobinski had noted at the charette in June that administrative funds might be available from the Community Preservation Committee. There followed a discussion of whether the proposal was under severe time constraints to meet an October deadline. Any projects to be funded with regular (that is, non-administrative) funds from the CPC must be presented to the CPC (Community Preservation Commission) prior to October 11, 2006. If the CPC accepts the project as worthwhile, it must then be presented and approved at the April, 2007, Town Meeting to receive funding. Since the RTCAC will not request CPC funding directly, but rather would advise the Board of Selectmen to do so, any non-administrative proposals for CPC funding must be presented to the Selectmen prior to that deadline. Requests for administrative funding may be granted by the CPC without Town Meeting involvement, and require no such delays. Sigrid Pickering said that she was not sure she could have a thoughtful proposal for a wildlife study prepared before the meeting on September 21, and Carole Wolfe pointed out that had the committee taken action on this last year when the possibility was discussed on several occasions there would not be a need to hurry the proposal now, especially in light of the fact that funding for the trail has been delayed from 2008 to 2010. It wasn't clear how much money might be available from the administrative funds, but they are said to be about 5% of the total CPC budget. Dick Williamson mentioned the possibility suggested by selectman Drobinski that other aspects of the design phase might also proceed in advance of a 25% design award, such as surveys and delineation of the wetlands. Sigrid offered that delineation of the wetlands would occur hand in hand with the wildlife study, but Bridget noted they are distinctly different based on various technical criteria. Carole Wolfe pointed out, and Selectman Keller confirmed, that Mr. Drobinski was not speaking for the Board of Selectmen, as the Selectmen have not taken a position on requesting additional funding.

**Questions for Public Safety Officials:**

The list of questions compiled by the RTCAC for public safety officials had been edited once more by Dick Williamson and was presented for approval. The committee approved this list, which Chair Pat Brown will send to the Town Manager to present to the Police and Fire chiefs. The committee decided to request that the chiefs respond within a month. Depending on their responses it will decide whether a meeting with them in October would be desirable. Madeleine Gelsinon suggested that in light of the concerns voiced by Dave Duane it would be prudent to ask all of the business neighbors of the trail to submit their concerns about public safety. As noted above, Jen Shemowat indicated she would be meeting individually with all of them.

**Preparations for Public Information Meeting on September 14**

The format of the meeting will consist first of brief Power Point presentations on the four topics to be emphasized (preliminary): Introduction to the RTCAC (Pat Brown) (1) maps of the BFRT to make clear the course of the ROW along its entire extent (Jennifer Pincus), (2) an overview of trail development processes and the current status of the north-south trail in Sudbury (Dick Williamson), (3) a summary of published studies of rail trails (Bridget Hanson), and (4) results of the survey of Sudbury trail neighbors (Pat Brown). It was agreed that the talks be brief, no longer than 10 minutes each, keeping the number of slides to a minimum, and that the audience be asked to withhold their questions until the poster session to follow. The speakers should present their Power Point slides to Mark Thompson ahead of time so that he can put all of them on a single disk to facilitate the presentations. A computer to control the presentations should be requested as well as a request that Mark setup and manage them. Betty Foley will take responsibility for that aspect of the meeting. Bob Hall has spoken with Lynn Pourro of Comcast and arranged to have the meeting video taped and presented live on the local TV channel if that time has not already been scheduled. He will provide Lynn with all of the details of the meeting, and she will do all of the taping. Members of the RTCAC should be at Town Hall by 6:30 to set up the room and equipment. To obtain more community input, comment forms will be made available in boxes around the room. Bridget and Jennifer will be responsible for setting them out and collecting them after the meeting. Copies of handouts of the presentations can be made in the Town Manager's office by Mary McCormack.

There followed brief discussions of the preliminary material assembled by the four speakers. Pat Brown will begin her presentation by pointing out that the data she will present are raw data, simple counts of the responses by trail neighbors, and not the percentages referred to in the Town Crier article that came under some criticism. Pat's talk summarizing the survey had 17 slides, far too many some members thought for a 10-minute presentation. She was urged to reduce them or concentrate on only a few.

Dick Williamson made his presentation for the most part in two slides, the first being the steps that need to be taken to achieve funding under state and federal transportation enhancement programs. He was asked if Sudbury is committed to pursuing funding only under the transportation enhancements program, which one of the titles on his slide suggested. Selectman Drobinski had indicated earlier that the Town was not, and selectman Keller confirmed that at this meeting. The town would seek CMAQ (Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality) funds, which appear to be more readily available presently. Dick pointed out, however, that the funding and guidelines under the CMAQ and Enhancements programs are fundamentally the same. Dick will present a third slide, a flow chart, in which the distinction between the two is made clear and, at Carole Wolfe's suggestion, make it known that some towns that have rail trails have paid nothing or very little towards their development. The prime example is the northernmost section of the BFRT (Phase I) that was financed almost entirely from state funds obtained by state representative Bruce Freeman. A fourth slide will be added to outline the Mass Highway design guidelines for shared-use paths, as would be constructed under either Transportation Enhancements or CMAQ funding.

Bridget Hanson provided a brief summary of the many trail studies she has read by concentrating on two issues that seem to be foremost among the concerns of trail neighbors: crime and property values. All of the studies were surveys, except one. Without exception there are none indicating that trail neighbors and users believe that trails lead to an increase in crime. In similar fashion the studies looking at neighbors' perceptions of changes in property values along rail trails all show no compelling evidence of a decline in values, perhaps a small increase, and some evidence that houses near trails may sell more rapidly. The recent study by Craig Della Penna in which he presents data, not opinions, regarding the sale of homes in three local towns, Arlington, Lexington and Bedford, appears to confirm the faster sale times. The finding that they sell for a higher percentage of the list price was regarded as more tenuous. Bridget indicated she will try to get statistical tests of

the data before accepting any of the conclusions, but still regards the study, as incomplete as it may be, as important because it is the only one she is aware of that has real data. The study came under fire from Carole Wolfe and Jim Nigrelli for its allegedly poor sampling methods. Carole felt the findings irrelevant because the towns are not like Sudbury as Craig suggested. Carole also stated she had gone to Dunstable to observe the location of the one sale Craig had sited in that town. She found that the house was over ¼ mile away from the trail, on the opposite side of the road leading to the trail, and at the end of a new cul-de-sac. Jim felt that Craig's associations with various real estate and rail trail organizations should be pointed out if the study is to remain on the website. He also criticized the RTCAC for not presenting studies that do show negative changes in property values, as well as other negative effects of rail trails, which he maintained are easy to find through simple Google searches. He requested once again that the Della Penna study be taken off the RTCAC website, but Dick Williamson replied that it was there because it had been presented at a RTCAC meeting and noted in the minutes. Dave Duane noted that as an investor in properties he was quite certain that rail trails have a negative effect on business property values.

The discussion turned again to Bridget's point that there are no studies indicating an increase in crime caused by rail trails. Bridget wanted the committee's backing on that conclusion, which some were not willing to offer. Carole Wolfe questioned the validity of the Pinellas Trail Study that would be used to demonstrate Bridget's assertion. Carole stated that even though the collected data indicated an increase in trail-related crime, the study concluded that due to what it called sampling errors, the incidents of trail-related crime were no greater than away from the trail. The motion was made to take a vote on her presenting it as the official view of the committee. The motion passed with two nay votes and one abstention, and Bridget will point out in her presentation that there is a minority opinion not in agreement.

Because the hour was late Jennifer Pincus took only a few minutes to say which maps she would be showing and what kinds of things she would say about them.

Two items on the agenda had to be left for later meetings. They were a discussion of the results of the June 15, FST charette and a discussion of the site walk by RTCAC members in June.

Pat Brown concluded the meeting by reminding everyone about the rules committee members must follow in their communications with each other. These are presented in the Sudbury Board of Selectmen's e-mail and committee conduct policies adopted in July, 2006. Briefly, committee business, except for procedural matters, can not be conducted online through email messages, and one must be extremely careful to avoid negative references to anyone, such as calling into question the veracity of people not of the same mind as the author.

**The next regular meeting of the committee will take place on September 21 at 7:30 P.M. at the DPW building.**

**The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 P.M.**

Submitted by Bob Hall on August 15, 2006

Approved on September 21, 2006