

**RAIL TRAIL CONVERSION ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**Town of Sudbury, Massachusetts**  
**Minutes of Meeting on December 8, 2005**

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

**Absent:** Dennis Mannone, Erich Poch

**Also present:** Three interested abutters: Elaine Kneeland, Jim Nigrelli and Mara Huston and Barbara Pike, a Friend of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail from Concord.

**Community Input**

Dick Williamson opened the meeting at 7:40 p.m. asking if any of the visitors would like to say something. Mara Huston is a rail trail abutter from Peakham Road. She is an ardent biker, rose to dispute the notion she has heard so frequently expressed by opponents of the rail trail, that such trails are dangerous because of bikers riding at speeds of 30 miles/hour or more. She maintained that ardent bikers capable of riding at those speeds do not ride on rail trails, as Craig Della Penna had argued at the previous meeting. She strongly supported a trail with an asphalt pavement, which is optimal for those who bike and skate at slower, safer speeds. She emphasized that it should be paved to accommodate roller bladers. There was no discussion of the issue.

**Past Minutes:**

Minutes of the October 27 meeting were approved with one minor correction, and minutes of the November 10 meeting were similarly approved with clarification of three points.

**Information:**

Dick Williamson reviewed for the Committee the presentation by Steve McLaughlin, Project Manager for Phase I of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) with Mass Highway at the meeting of the Friends of the BFRT in Acton on December 5, 2005. Mr. McLaughlin reviewed the history of Phase I (the 7 miles of trail from Lowell south to Westford) with the delays in construction for a number of reasons, most recently because contaminants had been found in the earth removed in the construction of the Assabet River Rail Trail (ARRT) in Hudson. That earth had been removed from the railbed prior to detecting significant contamination and piled along side the trail. Because the earth contains low level contaminants, the piles now present a problem for removal. To avoid this mistake in the construction of Phase I of the BFRT, Mass Highway has deferred construction pending a redesign to leave minimally contaminated earth undisturbed during construction. Contamination levels will be identified by testing using DEP protocols. The redesign will be finished in about a month and put out to bid. If there are no further problems construction should begin late next year.

Dick also reported on a meeting in Leominster sponsored by the Rails-to-Trail Conservancy (RTC) that he and Carole Wolfe attended on December 3. The topic of the seminar they attended was incorporating nature into trail design, but the topics were more wide ranging. One speaker from the Mass Audubon Extension presented a list of issues and topics involved in trail development. It was strongly urged that design firms for trails traversing natural areas have landscape architects on their staff. One interesting finding about the effects of disturbances on wildlife was that the species studied exhibited habituation (systematic reduction) of stress hormone responses when the disturbances occurred in a regular way but did not undergo such reductions when occurrences of the disturbance were unpredictable. The study of disturbances by joggers on wildlife and birds in Great Meadows was noted, but the results of that study are not yet in. The point was also made that the impact

on wildlife along narrow corridors was greater when the corridor was not surrounded by extensive natural environments. It was suggested also that rail trails might be corridors for invasive plant species which must be controlled. Another issue mentioned was the effect of dogs on wildlife, namely, that their scent scares away wildlife, and they must be kept out of turtle habitats. The basis of these various claims was not discussed in detail. The Mass Audubon Extension offered to help Sudbury in the surveys of wildlife along the rail bed of the proposed trail. The second speaker is another source that should be contacted, as he is a member of the Planner Collaborative for State Contracts developing a statewide master plan for multiple-use trails. Jack Downes, a key figure in the development of the Wachusett Greenway, which has a stone-dust path, claimed that type of path required no maintenance. Dick Williamson had heard that the path was actually maintained by volunteers, that the trail does not meet modern standards and has significant drainage problems.

## **Old Business**

### *Results of the Neighbors' Survey*

The first order of business here was to approve the statistical summary of the responses prepared by Dick Williamson and modified to meet objections made at two previous meetings. Carole Wolfe complained that the summary did not accurately represent the responses and skewed the results. She felt there should be no summary, just a presentation of the actual responses in each category. There was a motion, nevertheless, to accept the summary as presented. It passed with eight votes for and two against.

There followed a review of the comments made by the trail neighbors to supplement the multiple-choice answers on the questionnaire. Each committee member presented his impression of the comments. The following is a brief summary of those impressions:

Bridget Hanson thought the comments were useful, but mostly amplifications of the answers to the multiple-choice items. Several issues were raised that were not considered in the list of concerns the neighbors were asked to rate, such as the management of pets on the trail and the invasion by ATVs. It had been reported at one workshop that once a trail is open to the public the ATV use diminishes. However, everyone agreed that measures should be taken to discourage such abuses.

Bill Place noted that there was concern expressed in the comments about the presence of chemicals along stretches of the trail near agricultural facilities. He said, however, that the use of pesticides in those regions would not be permitted. Bill also noted the repeated concern about motorized vehicles.

Jennifer Pincus pointed out that there were still other concerns not covered in the questionnaire, such as the cost of the trail to the town, safety and environmental issues, toilet facilities and trail maintenance. She observed also that among the people who had used rail trails those who were critical of them tended to cite the Minuteman Trail as an example, whereas supporters of the trail were more likely to recount pleasurable experiences on more rural trails.

Sigrid Pickering felt that the comments reflected the basic nature of the town, which appears to have an identity crisis, being not quite suburban and not quite rural.

Dick Williamson noted that from the answers to question two, concerning a neighbor's preference for the type of surface, one could predict with some certainty the responses to all of the questions a neighbor would make. He also noted that the environmental concerns should not have been missed on the questionnaire.

Pat Brown felt that the comments pointed to the type of surface as the main issue. She also raised the question of Honora Haynes' objections to the trail, largely Pat thought, being yet another restriction on the land Ms. Haynes can use to pasture her horses. But Dick pointed out that conversations with Ms. Haynes indicated she was more concerned about people traffic through her property, which increased markedly when Featherland Park was opened. She was not swayed by promises that the trail would not make things worse; that is what she had been told when Featherland was proposed.

Carole Wolfe noted that the responses reflect what an extremely divisive issue the trail really is.

Betty Foley saw concerns about loss of the town character as a prevalent theme felt .

Nancy Powers was impressed with the thoughtfulness that went into many of the comments and realized there were important concerns that had not been considered in the questionnaire.

Jennifer was assigned the task of writing an overall summary of the comments on the basis of the actual comments made by the trail neighbors and the impressions noted above by the committee members. When this has been completed and approved, hopefully by the next meeting, the complete results of the survey will be sent to the Board of Selectmen.

### *Subcommittee Reports*

Dick Williamson announced that he has a video tape of an interview with the Director of Police Services in Arlington related to safety issue on the Minute Man Trail. Bridget Hanson recommended that the RTCAC should look at safety issues discussed in rail-trail studies. Carole Wolfe thought the emphasis should be on local trails. Pat Brown thinks that Sudbury safety officials should be talking with their counterparts in other towns, but it was noted that there are no trails in the immediately surrounding towns. An unpaved trail in Sterling was mentioned as one to investigate. A discussion followed about the list of “towns like Sudbury”, and it was generally agreed that the subcommittee will have to do more work in developing a list of towns and questions that our safety officials might use in pursuing the safety issues.

### **New Business**

#### *Meeting of Executive Office of Transportation with Concord Officials and Friends of the BFRT*

Dick Williamson reported on this meeting that was devoted largely to two topics. The first was the purchase of the CSXT-owned segment of the north-south ROW in Sudbury and Framingham by EOT, the goal being to have the entire ROW of the 25-mile railbed under the control of the state. That could possibly facilitate the development of the trail as the negotiations between CSXT and the towns of Framingham and Sudbury have been bogged down in liability issues for a long time. Such a purchase would also enhance the regional character of the project and aid in a integrated overall plan for the trail.

The second topic was the meeting held in Concord on November 22 requested by the Friends of the BFRT to propose that EOT explore the removal and sale of the rails and ties from those sections of the railbed where they have not yet been removed and purchase the extension of the right of way from Route 20 to its terminus in Framingham. Removing the rails from the segments of the right of way in Acton, Concord and Sudbury was presented as a way of reducing construction costs to the towns. The Friends had identified a potential buyer in Pennsylvania for the type of rail used in the railbed at prices that exceed those for scrap metal, the reason being that the rails enter directly into the fabrication of the product manufactured by the buyer. Carole Wolfe pointed out that the removal would have a downside, namely, the invasion by all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and snowmobiles., which has happened following the removal of the rails and ties on the CSXT railroad in Sudbury and Framingham. She also pointed out that Bridget noted that gates would help to reduce such incursions. Dick recommended that the town manager, Maureen Valente, should attend meetings dealing with both topics, but Bridget thought that Debbie Dineen had told her that the Conservation Commission would be the first to represent Sudbury in such negotiations. Carole was concerned that involvement of the town manager would give the impression that the town had already decided to move forward on the trail. It was also noted that CSXT never sought permission to remove the trails and ties in Framingham and Sudbury. It was their property and no permission was needed.

*Discussion of Draft of the RFP for the Engineering and Environmental Assessment (feasibility) Study*

The third draft of the RFP prepared by Dick Williamson was discussed. Sigrid Pickering suggested several changes in Item 10 in the Project-Scope section regarding the identification of wetlands, vernal pools, and wildlife habitats, indicating that the current data bases available are not adequate. Observations are really needed over at least two seasons, but there is the realization that the \$25,000 available for the study can not provide all of the information that one would like. Much of the detail is obtained in the second phase of the project, the 25% design. A few other minor changes/corrections of wording were agreed on. Dick will make the suggested changes in the RFP and circulate the new draft before the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:50 P.M. and opened to public comments.

*Public Comment*

Jim Nigrelli asked again how the RTCAC defines a rail trail, what it means by a shared path and a multiple-use trail. He complained that he had never received an answer to this question he had posed in email messages to the committee. Members of the committee were not clear about how to elaborate on the definitions it had already given and asked Mr. Nigrelli to give us some indication of what he was looking for in the definitions, the purpose of his question. In response, Mr. Nigrelli stated that he thought the choices in the questionnaire, with a single exception, did not conform to the AASHTO standards for path design. He inferred from this that questionnaire recipients might not understand the implications of an AASHTO-compliant rail trail. He proposed to reformulate his questions via e-mail for the RTCAC's consideration and response.

Elaine Kneeland wanted to know when the summaries of the neighbor surveys would be sent to the Board of Selectmen and when the summary of the committee's activities thus far would be submitted to the Town Report. Elaine also asked if Barbara Pike could tell us how the request for CPA funds for the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail had fared with the Concord CPC. Barbara responded that the support of the trail was unanimous and the amount requested, \$160,000, received an initial approval. Barbara also introduced herself as a member of the newly formed Concord Advisory Committee for the rail trail charged with seeing the development of the trail in Concord to its completion.

Submitted by Bob Hall on December 19, 2005

Approved on January 12, 2006