

**Town of Sudbury Massachusetts**  
**RAIL TRAIL CONVERSION ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**Minutes of the Meeting Held March 3, 2005**

**PRESENT:** Pat Brown, Madeleine Gelsonon, Bob Hall, Gregory Hunt, Dennis Mannone, Jennifer Pincus, Bill Place, Eric Poch, Bryan Semple, Dick Williamson, Carole Wolfe, Bridget Hanson.

Also Attending: Town Manager Maureen Valente

**INTRODUCTION** (Maureen Valente)

1. Committee Vacancy: Ms. Valente announced that due to a resignation, there is a vacancy on the Committee. The Selectmen will be considering a process for filling this vacancy.
2. Public Comment: 5 minutes. There were no public comments.
3. Mission Statement: Ms. Valente reviewed the Mission Statement from the Board of Selectmen to the Committee, reaffirming that the RTCAC is to give recommendations to the Board of Selectmen on the best way to accomplish the conversion of the rail line into a recreational path and alternative transportation corridor. It is the Board of Selectmen who will have responsibility for using the advice from the Committee to make final decisions on applying to the state for leasing the land, applying for grants or outside funding for construction, etc. The Board will very much value the advice from this committee, but understands they are the ones who will be making decisions.
4. Guiding information to the Committee in developing their report to the Board: Ms. Valente reviewed the following principles with the committee.
  - a) The Committee should only recommend actions that are reasonable, practical and responsible to the community.
  - b) The Committee should use a process that listens carefully to everyone's concerns, and will make opportunity for all to be heard. Public projects often do not make neighbors happy, but the committee should work to understand all the concerns and fairly evaluate them.
  - c) The Board of Selectmen is committed to seeing this process through and wants the report and recommendations of this committee.

**Visioning for the Rail Trail**

Vision Discussion: Ms. Valente asked committee members to begin documenting the reasons they believe the Town should develop the rail trail, and what they have as visions for the developed trail. Comments are summarized below:

*Why is the Town justified in creating a Rail Trail out of the unused rail line in Sudbury at this time?*

1. The existing portion of the unused Lowell-Sudbury rail line in Sudbury is a unique and underutilized asset to the Town and its residents. It already belongs to the taxpayers through its ownership by the state department of transportation, yet in its current condition, there are limitations to how it can be used.
2. The unused rail line connects many of Sudbury various public places. It connects schools (Nixon elementary and Lincoln Sudbury Regional High School). It connects Conservation areas. It connects to active recreational areas (Featherland, David).
3. The unused rail line connects neighborhoods to our Route 20 shopping area
4. The unused rail line connects to unused rail lines in other towns. Those towns are actively working to develop their rail lines into recreational trails at this time. Our planning will be better if we work with these other towns, both to understand what they are doing, and to look for ways that such coordination can lead to better outcomes for all towns involved.
5. Development of the unused rail line into a rail trail will require substantial funding. Such funding opportunities exist right now, in the form of Community Preservation Act funds and enhancement funding from the Federal government and the Commonwealth. With proper and timely planning, the Town of Sudbury could tap into those funds.
6. The unused rail line presents an opportunity to provide safer bicycling riding opportunities within Sudbury, particularly for the Town's children. With our historic and scenic yet narrow roads, there are not many of those opportunities.
7. The unused rail line presents opportunity to create a healthier, more active community by offering a way for residents of all ages to walk on a walking path that is away from traffic and level.
8. The unused rail line connects to other walkways that the Town has dedicated significant resources to creating and repairing in recent years.
9. Without the Town taking active role in developing the unused line, it could fall into other uses, such as has happened when abutters begin using the rail line for private purposes.
10. Without the Town taking an active role in developing the unused line, in its current condition, it could attract users who leave trash or inappropriately use the area. An actively used recreational trail could discourage such inappropriate behavior.
11. The unused rail line presents alternative transportation possibilities. Residents might use this trail instead of driving between points within Sudbury, or beyond our borders to nearby towns.

12. The unused rail line presents another way to appreciate the beauty of Sudbury, allowing for quiet and private walks in a unique setting.
13. The unused rail line presents the opportunity for access and use of a recreational asset of the Town by those with mobility challenges, including those in wheelchairs or strollers.

Ms. Valente asked for individual “visions” of what the developed trail will look like.

1. Ms. Wolfe’s concerns include:
  - a. That the development of the trail will not respect fragile wetlands, vernal pools, habitat near the unused rail lines, the current rural feel and character of the unused rail area, and the quiet, spiritual feeling that currently exists.
  - b. That there might be harm to bird populations in the area.
  - c. That the developed trail will not respect the privacy and other concerns of abutters.
  - d. The development of the trail will anticipate and deal with undesirable behavioral issues, such as litter.
  - e. The developed trail will have an urbanized feel to it.
2. Other Committee members added a variety of uses they could envision, including walking, jogging, running, bicycling, horse riding, cross country skiing, snow shoeing, roller blading, skate boarding, dog walking or riding non-motorized scooters.

The Committee discussed funding alternatives and what impact that might have on visions for the developed trail. Three primary funding sources were identified, although ultimately there could be a combination of funding sources

1. Enhancement funding. The Federal and state government would pay for 90% of the cost of the trail development if it met their approval for design and construction. Town would be required to provide 10% of project costs.
2. All locally funding. The Selectmen could request funding from the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) using CPA funds or from other town sources for design and construction. Funds could be privately raised as well. Limitations would be support from the CPC, Town Meeting, donors.
3. State budget. A request could be made to our legislators to “earmark” state funds for trail design and construction. This would also likely free us from the requirements associated with enhancement funding.

## **Committee Work Ahead**

The Committee discussed the process that would be followed to accomplish the mission assigned it by the Selectmen. Preliminary work includes:

1. The Committee will need to discuss and develop topics for the consultant to study during the feasibility study (the scope of work), assuming it is funding for it is approved by Town Meeting.
2. The Committee will need to discuss and develop plans for how it will address other issues not studied by the consultant.
3. The Committee will need to determine what information it makes available to the community. This might include but is not limited to:
  - a. Frequently asked questions document
  - b. Glossary of terms associated with rail trail development
  - c. Studies that have been done on other rail trail projects

The next meeting will be March 10th. The Committee will vote in a chairman, select a secretary, review rail trail studies from Dick Williamson and review surface treatments for a rail trail.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:34 p.m.