

RAIL TRAIL CONVERSION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Town of Sudbury, Massachusetts
Minutes of Meeting on September 12, 2005

Present: Pat Brown, Betty Foley, Madeleine Gelsinon, Bob Hall, Bridget Hanson, Sigrid Pickering, Jennifer Pincus, Bill Place, Nancy Powers and Carole Wolfe

Absent: Dennis Mannone, Erich Poch

Also present were Maureen Valente, the Town Manager, and seven interested residents of Sudbury

Past Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 7:40 P.M. by Pat Brown. It was not possible to approve the minutes of the July 18 meeting as the revision had not been sent to the committee members. It was noted, however, that they had been posted on the town website and would have to be removed until an approved version was available. Three corrections and additions were made in the minutes of the August 8 meeting, which were then approved.

Information Items

A number of documents have been placed in a rail trails binder at the Goodnow Library, including copies of the Concord Rail Trail Feasibility Study, a 1995 report from the Bikeways Task Force in Concord, and the Weston Majority Report. Dick Williamson has unearthed a rather large number of rail-trail studies from around the country, and he will place hard copies of those reports in Goodnow also.

Pat Brown attended a presentation to the selectmen and representatives of town committees about the Geographic Information System (GIS) and its potential uses in Sudbury. The meeting itself was recorded and is available for viewing on a DVD. There appear to be a great many sources of information of potential use to the RTCAC that might be integrated into the system, but it wasn't clear at present that we need specific kinds of data that aren't already available in the town database, such as roads, sidewalks and wetlands.

Dick Williamson presented an update on the rail-trails activity in Concord, noting that an updated version of the Concord Engineering and Environmental Assessment is now available. An item of considerable interest is the finding that the removal of the rails and ties along the EOT-owned section of the rail bed may not turn out to be a very expensive line item in the construction budget for the BFRT. The price of scrap steel has been relatively low recently, but rails of the type used along the Sudbury-to-Lowell railroad fall into another category regarded as industrial stock, whose value is significantly greater than the scrap value, making them economical to remove. If EOT negotiates their sale to an industrial buyer they would then remove them, along with the ties. In all probability, this would be done at no cost. The removal, of course, would have to meet with the approval of several town committees, such as the Conservation Commission. The potential savings to the town in the construction costs of the BFRT in Sudbury could be as much as 25%. Dick also informed the committee that the Concord Friends of the BFRT will request Community Preservation Act funds for a 25% design study of the trail. Carole Wolfe questioned why Concord would go ahead with such a study when the issues involving White Pond have not been resolved. Dick pointed out that the resolution would be part of the design project.

Old Business

The preliminary summary of the survey results was presented. This included a spread sheet with responses to each question from each household and a summary sheet of total and average values for some questions. A breakdown of the data for abutters and neighbors was suggested, and the list of all the households receiving the questionnaire will be sorted in that way. Dick Williamson also pointed out an obvious correlation

between the choices of the preferred type of trail and answers to most of the other questions. He will look more systematically at various correlations within the data. The committee felt strongly that all of its members should read the comments that accompanied the multiple-choice answers, and toward that end it will spend a significant amount of time at the next meeting doing that and discussing their impressions. Pat Brown requested that, for the record, the spread sheet listing the property owners to whom the questionnaire was sent be included as part of the paper record. Finally, the decision was made to have copies of all the completed questionnaires put in a binder that would reside in the Selectmen's office.

At this point, the chairman decided to consider one item of new business before returning to the scheduled old business, namely a draft of a letter to the selectmen that had two major parts: (1) a report of the status of various projects the RTCAC has been working on, and (2) a request for assistance from the selectmen along several lines. Bridget Hanson proposed that the second part might be presented better in a discussion with the selectmen. This proposal was adopted, and Dick and Pat will speak with them. Nevertheless, there was some discussion of several items.

The committee from the outset has had problems with its membership, in particular adequate representation from the Park and Recreation Commission and from abutters. The representative from Park and Rec has not attended a meeting since March, and the Commission has not appointed someone who is willing to attend on a reasonably regular basis. Carole Wolfe is the only abutter on the RTCAC, although Sigrid Pickering has some claim to that status. Maureen Valente spoke with Selectman O'Brien about the problem, and he suggested that the RTCAC might take the initiative and try to recruit someone from Park and Rec and from the abutters, using standard procedures, and presenting the results to the selectmen. There is no guarantee that they would accept the outcome of these efforts, but there is a chance they would. The committee agreed to take that initiative.

In Pat Brown's letter, she inquired of the selectmen whether the RTCAC has any authority to negotiate with CSXT about the lease of the ROW from south Sudbury to Framingham. Maureen described the somewhat laborious process by which such negotiations proceed, and indicated that the committee does not really have a role. Dick Williamson suggested that we might achieve some presence at the table as was the case with members of the Bike Trail Committee during town negotiations with CSX in the late eighties.

It was agreed that when the survey results have been completed and discussed, the RTCAC would ask the Selectmen if they would be willing to host a meeting of all interested Sudbury residents at the Town Hall in which the various concerns could be aired and discussed.

Some minor corrections were made in the first part of the letter, and Pat Brown will incorporate them into a second draft of the letter. The committee determined that requests for assistance comprising the second part of the letter should be omitted from the letter and discussed more informally with the selectmen.

Indiana Trails Study

This is a study of trails in six cities in Indiana carried out in 2001 by several groups at Indiana University and funded by several state and federal agencies. The six cities/towns differed in size and character, as did the six trails. The study has two major parts, the first being a study of trail use (traffic counts and a survey of usage by the same users), the second a survey of neighbors of the trails about such things as property values, quality of life along the trail and problems associated with the trails. What impressed Bridget about the study were the similarities in the results across all of the towns, and from her reading of other studies, across America. Committee members also pointed out deficiencies in the study. For example, since only those who found the trail safe and pleasant were likely to use it, survey responses from trail users were very likely to indicate the trails were safe and pleasant, independent of how the community at large experiences the trails. It was pointed out, however, that the major parts of the studies were surveys of property owners. Pat Brown noted that the

studies were commissioned by Indiana's Department of Transportation, and the results seemed to reflect the department's desire to reinforce its decision for spending funds on these trails. Pat Brown had also found census data that helped to characterize the different towns along several dimensions, such as total population, population density and income. It was clear that on those dimensions, the cities/towns differed appreciably from Sudbury, which led to the suggestion that the studies had little relevance to a rail trail in Sudbury. Bridget pointed out that the study conclusions were rather consistent independent of the population density and might well be good indicators of what to expect in Sudbury. The upshot was that Bridget offered to read all of the studies Dick had collected and present a synopsis of them with particular attention paid to the quality of the studies.

Public Safety Subcommittee. Did not meet.

Conservation Subcommittee.

Bridget Hanson, Carole Wolfe and Sigrid Pickering, met with Debbie Dineen, the town conservation coordinator, to talk about the kinds of information we should request from the contractor who will do the feasibility study of the rail trail. Three kinds of information were deemed paramount: wildlife habitat, wetlands function and value, and storm water runoff. The study of wildlife habitat in the wetlands and other areas should be concerned not just with endangered species, but with species that are recovering from depletion as well, such as mink and fisher cats. Moreover the study should be an integral part of the study, not relegated to an appendix. Massachusetts, apparently, is fortunate in having an unusually capable expert on the study of wild animals and their interactions with humans. Some effort will be made to have her work with whatever contractor is hired to do the feasibility study. Studies of the wetlands should include specifics about the various animal and plant species that inhabit them, such as their range and vulnerability. Storm water runoff is one of the major causes of water pollution and must be seriously addressed in any feasibility study. Carole, Bridget and Sigrid are to compile a list of items that will be included in a request for proposal to engineering firms.

Guest Speakers

Carole recommended Craig Della Penna as a speaker for a meeting. The recommendation was accepted, but an invitation will not be extended for the October meeting because a substantial part of that meeting has already been dedicated to reading the comments included on the questionnaires that were returned to the RTCAC. The invitation will be for the November meeting.

The next RTCAC meeting has been postponed from the usual time, the second Thursday of the month (October 13) because that day is Yom Kippur. It will be held on the last Thursday, October 27, 2005.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:45 P.M. and opened for comments from the public. These included a request for clarification of the percentage statistics used in summarizing the survey results, a suggestion that much useful information might be gained from nearby towns that have rail trails, a clarification of how topics get put on the RTCAC agendas, and specifically whether nonmembers can make such requests, and whether extension of the due date for receipt of the questionnaires was ever made public. There was a notification in town hall, but for some reason the notice did not appear in the Town Crier although it was submitted.

Submitted by Bob Hall on September 14, 2005

Approved by the RTCAC on October 27, 2005