

**RAIL TRAIL CONVERSION ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**Town of Sudbury, Massachusetts**  
**Minutes of Meeting on December 14, 2006**

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

**Absent:** Madeleine Gelsinon, Sigrid Pickering, Eric Poch

**Also Present:** FST project engineer Jennifer Shemowat, Selectman William Keller and residents Dan DePompei, Margaret Harty, Bill Kelly, Kevin Matthews and Jim Nigrelli,

The formal meeting of the Committee was deferred so that guest speakers, Colleen Abrams, president of Wachusett Greenways Association, and Ed Yaglou, Chairman of the Mass Central Rail Trail Task Force, could make their presentation without undue delay.

**The Wachusett Greenways:**

Ms. Abrams began her presentation with a brief slide show of pictures of the trail at various stages of construction as well as sections of the finished trail. There were also many photos of the trail lined up along one wall of the room that everyone was invited to view at the end of her formal presentation. Eleven miles of trail, which is part of the Mass Central Rail Trail, have been completed, and one mile is currently under development.

The Wachusett Greenways have a stone dust surface. When asked why, Ms. Abrams replied that is what the Division of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), which owns a significant part of the land, said it should be. Stone dust was also chosen because it is less expensive to install, that it was thought to be less expensive to repair than an asphalt surface and because it has a “feel” more appropriate to a rural watershed. Ms. Abrams estimated that the cost of the trail was about \$50,000 to \$100,000 per mile, but that did not include all of the work done by volunteers. Ms. Abrams and Mr. Yaglou agreed that the cost to the towns was about the same ( or possibly more) than the 10% matching funds required under the federal programs. When asked about maintenance Ms. Abrams replied that volunteers blow away the leaves in the fall, and they occasionally bring in a roller to smooth surfaces that have become rough. Where the trail had been properly constructed there has been no need for major maintenance. However, Dick Williamson noted there was one section in West Boylston in need of major repair, which was in line with other reports he had heard about difficulties with stone dust surfaces at the Mass Highway Moving Together, Bicycle and Pedestrian Conference. Ms. Abrams said they had not experienced those problems. Ms. Abrams also noted there were several reasons for the difficulties on the Wachusett Greenways Dick had noted. It was the first section of the trail to be finished (in 1997), and they still had much to learn about trail construction at that time. Moreover, the trail was not crowned or pitched properly to provide good drainage, which she acknowledged to be very important with this type of trail. Ties had also been proposed as a border for the trail to prevent sloughing off, but that, as was subsequently demonstrated on a trail near Lake Quinsigamond, did not work. Bridget Hanson mentioned several sections of the trail that were rutted or otherwise unpleasant for cyclists. There was no stone dust topping on one, the stone dust was too thick on another, and poor drainage on yet another. Ms. Abrams discussed the specific construction techniques used on various sections of the trail, why these had been adopted (sometimes at the request of the specific landowner involved), why some had not

worked, and currently recommended techniques. The finest stone dust also turned out to be less than optimal, and they found that no more than 3 or 4 inches of a coarser grind should be used to top the gravel base because the trail becomes mushy in the spring with a thicker layer. Ms. Abrams also noted that the workshops on building gravel roads at the University of Massachusetts are a useful resource. The trail supports use by road bikes as well as mountain bikes, though not in all sections. It can be used by strollers and wheel chairs also, everything but roller blades. Aside from the problem areas discussed above, Ms. Abrams reported the trail has not required more maintenance or showed more deterioration than a paved trail. Runoff into the surrounding watershed from the stone dust surface has not proved to be a problem.

The Wachusett Greenways have been built in a kind of patchwork fashion, a section at a time, wherever ownership issues have been resolved and financial support made it possible. The trail had multiple owners: private, the watershed division of DCR and the Fish and Wildlife Service. Financial support has come from state matching grants, foundations, the 6 towns in the area (four along the right of way, ROW), businesses and private sources. A Holden family donated \$160,000 that paid for two bridges and the section of trail in between them. Support by the towns has varied a great deal, but all of them have contributed toward construction and maintenance costs. The Task Force of the Wachusett Greenways Association (WGA) in partnership with the towns has been the principal administrator of the project.

Perhaps what is most remarkable is that much of the work has been done by volunteers, even some of the work requiring heavy construction equipment. For example, most of the trees of whatever size that had to be removed were taken down by volunteers. Volunteers were present to help when the four prefabricated bridges were installed. (The bridges were made by the Continental Bridge Company in Minnesota.) In general, however, the towns have done most of the construction and the volunteers take care of the maintenance, signage and other relatively light work. Ms. Abrams pointed out that information about student volunteers can be obtained from DCR and from Americorps. Ed Yaglou noted that one significant advantage of using volunteers to build and maintain a trail is that it builds a cadre of friends that continue to support it and maintain it.

There was not enough time to permit Sudbury residents to ask questions of the speakers, but Ms. Abrams and Mr. Yaglou graciously agreed to talk with the residents outside the hall after the Committee thanked them for a most informative talk.

**Pat Brown called the meeting to order at 8:40 p.m.**

**The Committee approved the minutes of the November 9 meeting after several additions and corrections were accepted.**

### **Old Business:**

#### *Update on requests for CPA Funding*

The Town Manager presented the requests for the funding of three rail-trail research projects from the Board of Selectmen (BOS) to the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) at a meeting on December 6. No word has been received yet about the CPC's decision to fund the projects or not

Pat Brown reported on the comments made at the meeting by Dave Duane of Methods, Machine Tools, an abutter to the ROW, who voiced two primary concerns: He was convinced that the intersection of the trail and the company's driveway would inevitably lead to someone

being killed by his trucks or cars. He was also disturbed that his company was being held to stricter conservation standards than the proposed rail trail. This apparently stemmed from a belief that if the trail were constructed by Mass Highway it would not be subject to the stricter Sudbury conservation regulations; that is, Mass Highway could override the Sudbury Bylaws if it deemed that necessary. Pat Brown had sent an e-mail on December 6 following the CPC meeting requesting that the Board of Selectmen make a formal determination that they would subject the rail trail conversion project to the same standards (local regulations and bylaws) that applied to other project proposals in the Town. Jen Shemowat pointed out that whoever submits the 100% design for construction bidding applies for the associated permits. If this were Sudbury the town would set the conditions to conform with its own regulations. If Mass Highway were to control the bidding and construction it would operate under its own standards, but it is extremely unlikely that it would violate Sudbury's regulations. Pat Brown had understood that the Town of Sudbury would submit the 100% design for permitting only if the Town were paying for the 100% design, and questioned who (the Town which had acquired the permits, Mass Highway as general contractor, or a contractor chosen by Mass Highway to perform the construction) would be responsible for correcting any violations of local bylaws and regulations. Bridget Hanson pointed out that the town has never violated its Bylaws. This raised the point once again that if the trail is built the town should appoint someone to oversee the construction to assure that it occurs in accordance with the contract and all town regulations. When selectman Keller was asked what the BOS would do if there appeared to be a conflict between Mass Highway's standards and the town's standards he replied that the BOS would deal with the particular situation, but that such a situation has never occurred. Bridget noted that there have been two situations that she knows of where the town's laws were not clear and the matters were brought before the BOS.

#### **Letter to the Town Boards and Commissions:**

Nancy Powers had drafted a letter that was circulated to RTCAC members for their input in the days before the meeting. The letter asked for input from several boards and commissions regarding any concerns or ideas they might have about the proposed rail trail and expressed a willingness on the part of the Committee to meet with them. The letter with one correction was approved and will be sent to the Historical Commission, the Planning Board, the Conservation Committee and Park and Recreation Commission. It will be sent as both a hard copy letter and an email message. Responses may be sent to Bill Place (hardcopy) or to the e-mail address for the RTCAC.

#### **FST Presentation on November 16:**

The video tapes of both the November 16<sup>th</sup> meeting and the presentation on September 14 will be copied onto CDs and made available at the Town Manager's/Selectmen's office for public viewing. Copies of the final report of the Engineering and Environmental Assessment by FST were distributed to RTCAC members, and a copy will be placed in the Goodnow Library.

#### **Discussion of the 2003 update of the 1987 Phase 2 CTPS Feasibility Study:**

This study presented updated traffic volume counts and automobile accident counts at the intersections of the ROW and the roads it crosses in Concord and Sudbury. Where counts were not available at precisely those locations data from nearby points along the same roads were used. There was little discussion of the report, as there was little in the data or the

recommendations that was surprising. The data may be useful in the design of the trail if the town goes ahead with the project.

**Neither the Safety nor the Conservation Subcommittees had anything new to report.**

**Update of the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Posted on the RTCAC Website:**

Dick Williamson distributed prior to the meeting a suggested revision of the FAQ to bring it up to date and more in keeping with the present stage of trail investigations. Some committee members had not had time to read it critically, so it was agreed that members would send suggestions for changes to Dick who would try to accommodate them, leaving possibly controversial ones for discussion at the January meeting.

**New Business:**

**The CTPS “Feasibility Study of the Proposed Extension of the Bruce N. Freeman Memorial Path in Sudbury and Framingham”**

Some committee members already have hard copies of the study, and it will be made available to the others in electronic form. Dick Williamson noted that Maureen Valente, the Town Manager, was to arrange for a presentation of the results by Cathy Lewis of CTPS to the BOS. This probably won’t occur until after the first of the year.

**The RTCAC Website:**

Pat Brown raised concerns about the website, suggesting that it is in need of updating and corrections. For example, the only feasibility study currently on the website is the one done for Acton. This should be replaced by the just completed study for Sudbury. The FAQ under revision discussed above is another item clearly in need of replacement.

There was too little time left to discuss other items on the Agenda; those discussions were postponed until the next meeting.

Submitted by Bob Hall on December 21, 2006

Resubmitted on January 8, 2007

Approved January 11, 2007