

**RAIL TRAIL CONVERSION ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**Town of Sudbury, Massachusetts**  
**Minutes of Meeting on February 9, 2006**

**Present:** Pat Brown, Betty Foley, Madeleine Gelsinon, Bridget Hanson, Dennis Mannone, Sigrid Pickering, Jennifer Pincus, Bill Place, Eric Poch, Nancy Powers, Dick Williamson.

**Absent:** Bob Hall, Carole Wolfe

**Also present:** Jim Nigrelli, Dick Wolfe and Melanie Weaver.

**Public Comment**

There were no public comments prior to the meeting.

**The meeting was called to order at 7:40 P.M.**

**Past Minutes:**

Consideration of the January 12 minutes was deferred until March because Bob was not present to incorporate the suggested changes.

**Old Business**

*Status of RFP*

Bill Place was delayed in attending the meeting, and consideration of this item was deferred till he arrived later in the evening.

*Draft of letter to public safety officials*

Dick Williamson presented a letter for RTCAC to send to Sudbury public safety officials indicating that they might have questions concerning the proposed rail trail, and directing them to public officials in neighboring towns with whom they might discuss trail-related issues. Madeleine Gelsinon asked whether the committee should expect a response from this letter. Dick stated that the letter was purely informational and that the RTCAC was not authorized to ask questions of or to request a response from Sudbury public safety officials. Pat Brown had understood that safety related questions were not to be open-ended, but that public safety officials could be asked specific questions by the committee. Her notes from the July 20, 2005 meeting with Pat, Dick, Town Manager Maureen Valente, Police Chief Fadgen, and Fire Chief MacLean were not clear on this point. Dick will try to clarify the extent to which the RTCAC may request information from Sudbury public safety officials by discussing this with Maureen. Pat Brown objected to including Arlington in a list of "towns like Sudbury" from which the chiefs might solicit information. Dick responded that there are no "towns like Sudbury" and that the listed towns are places where information related to rail trails could be obtained, and that this information was not limited to public safety issues. Jennifer Pincus suggested that Hudson and Marlboro be included in the list of contacts because, although their trail had not been open long, they were the nearest towns to Sudbury with operational rail trails. These were added, and Eric Poch submitted a reformulated concluding paragraph. The letter was accepted by the committee as amended and will be sent by Dick Williamson to the Sudbury public safety officials for their information.

A discussion concerning questions which had already been put to public safety officials and referred to the committee led to the proposal that these questions be considered by the committee. Specifically, the committee will discuss in March the questions submitted to Sudbury officials by Sudbury Citizens for Responsible Land Stewardship (SCRLS) in July 2005. It will also consider the questions raised in Allan

Wallack's presentation on article 43 for Sudbury Town Meeting in 2005 (concerning \$25,000 in funding for the preliminary engineering feasibility study of the proposed trail) and Selectman John Drobinski's list of concerns about the trail presented at the same town meeting. The committee will sift through the questions to determine which questions remain unanswered, which questions the committee can address, and how the other issues are to be handled. This is in accordance with the committee's responsibility as the focal point for community questions concerning safety issues on the proposed trail.

## **New Business**

### *Presentation of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service assessment of cycling in the Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge*

Dick Williamson presented to the committee the appendix to the complete assessment. The appendix presents a recommendation to permit cycling in the refuge. Dick noted that the refuge is not contiguous to the proposed rail trail in Sudbury, but stated that the USFWS report on the effect of cycling upon wildlife and wetlands could be relevant to these issues on the Sudbury right of way. Sigrid Pickering stressed that any such comparisons must be made with great care because the situations in the wildlife refuge and on the Sudbury right of way are fundamentally different. She pointed out that reintroducing a cycling on an already paved trail in the refuge is much less disruptive than first paving a right of way which has been allowed to revert to nature for thirty years (as in Sudbury) and then introducing cycling. She also cautioned that the report specifically states that there are no endangered species near the trails on which cycling would be permitted in the refuge, in contrast to the right of way in Sudbury on which rare and endangered species are known to dwell. The committee retained copies of this appendix for future reference.

### *Disposition of the transcript of a video interview*

Dick Williamson presented his transcript of a video interview with two Arlington officials in which they gave positive comments about the Minuteman Bikeway in Arlington. The interview was done in 1998, and neither of the persons interviewed still occupies his former position. It is not known who interviewed the officials. Dick suggested that this transcript be forwarded to Sudbury public safety officials for their information. The committee determined that this would be unnecessary and might dilute the effect of the letter to those officials approved earlier in the meeting.

### *Discussion of "Rail Trails and Safe Communities"*

Bridget Hanson presented this 1998 study of 372 rail trails from the Rails to Trails Conservancy as one commonly cited concerning crime on rail trails. Bridget, Dick, and Pat agreed that the presentation of statistics in the study was misleading, since community crime rates reported per 100,000 population are not comparable with trail crime rates reported per 100,000 users. A trail user is exposed to the trail for a short period during each use, while population statistics are based on the population for a calendar year. The quantitative conclusions of the study are derived from a comparison of these non-comparable rates, and were rejected by the committee. Bridget concluded that trails are not in general less safe than the surrounding communities. She was impressed that the twelve letters from public safety officials were positive about the effects of trails and used similar language to describe them. These letters indicate that rail trails do not function as "crime magnets." Dick Williamson thought that the absolute number of major crimes reported on rail trails was very small. Pat Brown thought that it was difficult to understand a homogeneous study of many types of trail and suggested that a more concrete study like the Pinellas County study would be more understandable. The committee agreed that "Rail Trails and Safe Communities" should not be posted on the website.

*Discussion of the “Pinellas Trail Community Impact Study” (Chapter 3)*

Discussion of this study was deferred until the March committee meeting.

*Consideration of inclusion of the home - sales study on the website*

Bridget Hanson submitted a Study of Home Sales Near Two Massachusetts trails done by Craig Della Penna’s realty firm. Craig had described this study to us during his presentation to the committee in October, 2005. The study describes his analysis of sales near the Nashua River Rail Trail and the Minuteman Bikeway during four months of 2005 and concludes that homes near rail trails have become desirable. This study was approved by the committee for posting on the website. Pat Brown will see that it is posted.

*Proposal for an informational meeting with the public*

Pat Brown had included an item in the agenda to request that a public discussion of the RTCAC survey results be held by the Selectmen. This would occur after Sudbury Town Meeting in April. The purpose of the meeting is both to inform citizens and to receive information from those who are not trail neighbors. Dick Williamson proposed that Pat and he put together a power point presentation of results for the public. This would be considered by the committee after Town Meeting. The intention is to be prepared for a presentation sometime in May.

*Status of the RFP*

Bill Place had contacted Town Manager Maureen Valente concerning the status of the RFP the committee had approved during the January meeting. Maureen will be presenting this formally to the selectmen at their February 14 meeting. The Selectmen will then consider and hold open discussion of the RFP at their February 28 meeting. Committee members were urged to attend the February 28 meeting in particular.

This led to a discussion of the timetable necessary to have a plan available for an application for CPC funding for a 25% design study of the rail trail in the fall of 2006, which would permit a presentation to Town Meeting in the spring of 2007. The committee also discussed what responsibilities the committee might have in such a process. Eric Poch noted that the Town Manager and Selectmen, rather than volunteer committees, present proposals to the Town Meeting. Dick Williamson will talk to Maureen to see what the committee’s responsibilities are in a request for CPC funding.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately **9:10 P.M.** and opened for community input.

**Community Input**

There were no public comments following the meeting.

Submitted by Pat Brown on February 11, 2006

Approved March 9, 2006