

RAIL TRAIL CONVERSION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Town of Sudbury, Massachusetts
Minutes of Meeting on January 12, 2006

Present: Pat Brown, Betty Foley, Madeleine Gelsinon, Bob Hall, Bridget Hanson, Dennis Mannone, Jennifer Pincus, Bill Place, Eric Poch, Dick Williamson, Carole Wolfe.

Absent: Sigrid Pickering, Nancy Powers

Also present: Stephen Hultin and his father, interested abutters including, Elaine Kneeland, Jim Nigrelli, Margaret Harty, Mara Huston and Melanie Weaver, also Barbara Pike from Concord, a Friend of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail.

Public Comment Before Meeting

Elaine Kneeland asked why the CSXT-owned segment of the proposed rail trail was not included in the RFP (Request for Proposal) to be discussed later in the meeting. The answer is that because the section south of the Mass Central crossing near Chiswick Park is owned by CSXT and not the EOT (Executive Office of Transportation) the lease or purchase of that segment is uncertain and awaits successful negotiations between CSXT and the towns of Sudbury and Framingham. Ms. Kneeland also asked how reliable are cost estimates for construction of the rail trail provided in a preliminary environmental and engineering assessment, as she has heard that Hudson has had to request additional funds for a traffic light at a road crossing after that section of the Assabet River Rail Trail was completed. She is concerned that estimates presented to Town Meeting based on results of the preliminary study might be misleading underestimates. It was pointed out that the initial study will identify sites where traffic lights should be, but not necessarily the actual construction costs. Such costs could be borne by the state but would require separate grants if funds are not actually included in the construction costs for those lights finally negotiated by MassHighway. It was also stressed that the Town, including the RTCAC, must be diligent in understanding the estimates and identifying items which may have been omitted so that expenses can be estimated accurately.

The meeting was called to order at 7:40 with a consideration of the December 8 minutes, which were adopted as amended. Pat Brown then read the letter sent to the committee by Stephen Hultin of Sudbury Boy Scout Troop 63, who was in the audience with his father. Scouts working toward a Citizenship-in-the Community merit badge are required to write a letter concerning an issue in the community to a party responsible for that issue. In his letter Stephen extolled the potential benefits of the proposed rail trail and indicated that Boy Scouts might be willing to help out in such ways as picking up trash along the trail and raking leaves. The committee thanked Steven for his commitment to public service and to the proposed trail.

Old Business

Summary of Comments on the Questionnaires Sent to Trail Neighbors

Jennifer Pincus had submitted a summary of the comments made on the questionnaires sent to abutters of the right of way (ROW) and others living close to it. The summary was discussed and then approved after some relatively minor changes. Dick Williamson will append it to the statistical summary of the responses and send it to the Board of Selectmen.

Carole Wolfe criticized what she regarded as a selective presentation by Dick Williamson of just some of the responses to the questionnaire in the fall newsletter of the Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (FBFRT), thus creating a false perception of the survey's results. The newsletter appears on the website of the FBFRT and thus indirectly on the RTCAC website linked to it where the same impression would be conveyed.

She felt that the summary gave a misleading representation of the support for the rail trail and was similar to the impression given by an article that appeared earlier in the Town Crier and in information at the Friends' display on Sudbury Day. She said that it was wrong for Dick to take RTCAC data and use it incorrectly to serve his own mission and that of the Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail in support for a paved trail. Specifically, Carole objected to the report of only a few percentages, the most misleading being that 29% of the trail neighbors were against the development of a trail, implying, she said, that 71% were in favor. Bridget Hanson suggested that Carole write a paragraph indicating what she thought the survey said, but Carole replied that she simply wanted to go on record as saying the summary was misleading, and it was wrong to state it that way. Pat Brown added that when the RTCAC did not confirm the published survey results, because these results had not been officially accepted by the committee, the Town Crier was left in a difficult position Dick Williamson suggested that the final summary of the questionnaire approved by the RTCAC be sent to the Town Crier, but there was little support for this proposal. It was suggested that the committee could request that the Selectmen make the approved survey results public. The committee determined that Dick Williamson should send the survey results as approved with the comment summary to the Selectmen as the official survey results.

Review of the Latest Draft of the Request for a Proposal

Bridget noted that the Conservation Subcommittee had previously sent recommended changes in the RFP to Dick Williamson rather than the RTCAC, and that those recommendations had already been included in the draft RFP. The changes made known to the RTCAC at this meeting were relatively minor, involving for the most part changes in a few words at four or five places. Bridget suggested that the RFP might include a request for one or more open meetings between towns people and the study consultants of the kind that Nick Rubino of Earth Tech had suggested were very useful, but Dick Williamson noted that the request need not be explicit in the RFP. Bridget then moved that the RFP with the approved changes be accepted, and it was approved unanimously. It will be given to the Selectmen and to Bill Place, the Town's point man on this project.

Subcommittee Reports:

Safety Subcommittee

Dick Williamson distributed copies of a document called "Rail Trails and Safe Communities", a study commissioned by the National Parks Service and carried out by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. All members were asked to read it and be prepared to discuss it at the February meeting. Dick had made a transcript of an interview of the Arlington Chief of Police in a video concerning safety issues along the Minuteman Bike Trail, and this transcript will also be discussed at the February meeting.

Dick took an opportunity to bring committee members up to date on two important rail-trail developments in Concord and Acton. The Community Preservation Committee (CPC) in Concord approved last week the full funding of a request made by the Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail for \$160,000 to fund the so-called 25% design and engineering study of the trail in Concord. The CPC in Acton is voting on a similar measure as this committee is meeting tonight, the sum requested being \$125,000.

New Business

Recommendations to the Selectmen

Bridget Hanson led this discussion noting that there are basically two kinds of issues the committee is dealing with: those with which we can be fairly comfortable in our recommendations, and those requiring due diligence on our part and the selectmen's. To get a sense of where the committee stands she suggested that each of us declare which of the following choices best fits his or her position on the north-south trail:

1. Do nothing. Leave the railbed the way it is and make no attempt to develop a trail.

2. Make the railbed into a dirt path that might be suitable for walking and cross-country skiing.
3. Construct a paved path that might broaden the utility of the path depending on the type of surface used.

Bridget explained that a 'paved path' is a term she is using to describe a shared-use path roughly fitting the AASHTO standards, but that the firm surface of such a path could be asphalt or something else like stonedust.

The following sentences capture only the main points made by each member:

Carole Wolfe was uncertain about the first two options because she needed results from the wildlife and wetlands studies before making a choice, but she was clear that she did not want asphalt pavement.

One of her concerns was for the loss of a rural environment she believes would result from a paved trail.

Pat Brown expressed a strong feeling that she did not want "another paved road through the woods."

Eric Poch would like to see a paved path for multiple uses and with relatively easy maintenance.

Dick Williamson felt the same way citing the widest use and financial reasons for his choice.

Jennifer Pincus agreed, noting that the railbed as it exists is not an amenity. It requires development to be useful. We have plenty of walking paths but no safe place for other recreational uses such as biking.

Bob Hall favors an asphalt trail for the widest possible use, believing that it will not be an aesthetic insult to the landscape.

Bill Place is for the development of a trail, but open to the type of surface. He noted one advantage, that of connecting playgrounds, conservation areas and schools through the trail.

Dennis Mannone was reluctant to make any firm choice, preferring to wait for the results of the initial study, but noted his concerns about the cost of maintenance. He is open to the possibility of a paved surface.

Madeleine Gelsinon expressed concern about a trail coursing through wetlands with large mosquito populations and the potential for viral infections, as well as disturbing the beauty of the area. She was also worried about possible negative impacts on trail neighbors. Her preference is to leave the railbed as it is or make a dirt path.

Betty Foley thinks there are no good places for long walks or to bike or run safely in town and favors a paved path to correct that deficiency.

Bridget Hanson favors a paved path, saying there are a lot of places to walk in conservation land and elsewhere. Other unaesthetic features of our town are more annoying than a trail is likely to be. Safe walks to school are important. Financial and environmental issues will drive the choice of a paved surface.

Bridget talked with Selectman Drobinski who indicated that the selectmen were not seeking specific recommendations, although they would welcome those also, but they were mainly concerned that the committee is sure that building a trail is the responsible thing to do and is as certain as possible that the trail will be safe.

April Meeting

The committee found it difficult to schedule a meeting in April because of holidays, town meeting and school vacation. It voted to skip the April meeting. The next meeting will take place on May 11.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:45 and opened for community input.

Community Input

Mara Huston congratulated the committee for approving the RFP this evening and thanked it for its diligent efforts in reaching that point.

Melanie Weaver pointed out that fencing is likely to be a bigger problem than most people might think it will be – for both safety and aesthetic reasons. She urged the committee to work hard on that with the design

and construction firm. Dick Williamson indicated that the designers would interact closely with the abutters to the trail and that appropriate fencing located on the rail bed would be part of the design and construction costs. The cost of additional fencing that abutters want on their private property would be borne by the property owner.

Jim Nigrelli asked if there is a list of consultants the town can ask to submit proposals for the environmental and engineering assessment. The committee explained that there is a long list of state approved firms, and the RFP will be posted on the Central Register. The list will be whittled down by the consultants themselves as they decide whether they are interested or not. Mr. Nigrelli responded that he was aware of this list as he had already called each of the firms approved for this type of construction. He did not, however, say why he had called them. Mr. Nigrelli also asked whether the RTCAC had ever discussed a trail that did not conform to the MassHighway, EOTC and AASHTO guidelines for shared-use paths. The answer was that the committee explicitly did so tonight and that Carole Wolfe had expressed her desire for a foot path on many occasions. He commended the committee on the rapid response it afforded Stephen Hultin's letter, but indicated he was discouraged by the long time he had to wait for a response to his question about the definition of a shared-use path. Finally, Mr. Nigrelli pointed out that the committee seemed to be putting the cart before the horse in submitting an RFP when it was uncertain about many issues, including what kind of trail it would like to see. Private business could not operate that way he said.

Eric Poch pointed out that this is not the first time the town has been interested in developing a rail trail and had reached a point where the decision about submitting an RFP had to be made. The cost of the initial study, \$25,000, is actually very small, but a necessary first step if anything is to be accomplished. The town won't know what all of its options are until such a study is completed.

Ms. Kneeland suggested that the **survey** results should not go to the Town Crier until Carole Wolfe has approved them. She also reiterated her earlier point that the environmental and engineering assessment should be as comprehensive as possible, including all known or likely costs. Dick Williamson indicated that the town isn't paying construction costs and that it has considerable leverage on what is covered in the next phase, the 25% design.

Margaret Harty pointed out that septic conditions on some sections of the trail were poor.

Submitted by Bob Hall on January 17, 2006

Approved March 9, 2006