

RAIL TRAIL CONVERSION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Town of Sudbury, Massachusetts
Minutes of Meeting on July 13, 2006

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

Absent: Madeleine Gelsinon,

FST representative: Jennifer Shemowat

Also present: Margaret Harty, Elaine Kneeland, Jim Nigrelli

Public Comments:

Elaine Kneeland noted that the Lexington police have reported one incident of indecent exposure and another of a sexual predatory nature involving a 14-year-old girl on the Minute Man trail, the point being that undesirable and criminal behavior does happen on rail trails. Bill Place noted that such incidents occur also in Sudbury's recreational areas.

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

Past Minutes: With two changes, the deletion of one sentence and the modification of another, the minutes of the meeting on June 8, 2006 were approved.

Old Business:

Pat Brown began by reminding the committee that much work had to be done if we are to adhere to the schedule proposed by FST. The last comments from town residents from the June 15 public meeting held by FST should be available for the committee's inspection by the August 10 meeting. Pat also presented an outline of committee responsibilities discussed during a July 6 meeting with Town Manager Maureen Valente, Selectmen John Drobinski, Town Engineer Bill Place, FST design engineer Jen Shemowat, and RTCAC co-chairs Dick Williamson and Pat Brown. These responsibilities include the RTCAC reviewing a draft of the FST proposal and returning comments to FST prior to the end of September. Committee members will receive copies of this draft in late August. The committee will have to meet twice in September, once on the 14th to present a report to the town (see below) and again on the 21st, to discuss the committee's comments on the FST's draft. Jen Shemowat indicated that a later date for the second meeting is possible if the committee needs extra time.

List of Questions for Public Safety Officials to be Presented to the Selectmen

Two lists were discussed, one a list of 10 questions distilled by Dick Williamson from an earlier list of 12, and a second one of 9 additional questions compiled by Carole Wolfe. The initial discussion revolved mainly around the first list of 10 questions, and relatively discrete changes were made in several in which there was little cause for disagreement. For example, Question 2 begins with the statement, "The proposed rail trail is likely to have bollards or gates to prevent motorized vehicles from entering the rail trail." The underlined words, or gates, were added. Dick Williamson will edit the list before the next meeting trying to incorporate all of the suggested changes and additions from Carole Wolfe's list, Pat Brown emphasized that only one list will be presented to the Board of Selectman, which will then be presented to our public safety officials -- the original list edited by Dick with approved additions by Carole and Madeleine Gelsinon. The committee will vote on the list at the August meeting.

A general issue arose in the discussion of question 9 regarding how a curfew or, more generally, any rules for using the trail would be enforced. The legal authority for enforcing acceptable behavior on the trails does not seem to exist presently. The Bylaws of the town contain no provisions. The Park and Recreation Department has rules governing the use of its properties; there are regulations in effect from other commissions, and the state Department of Conservation and Recreation has laws governing its lands, but it is not clear that any of the town or state regulations apply to rail trails. Jen Shemowat offered to inquire how other towns are dealing with this question. The committee could alert the Board of Selectman that such information will be forthcoming.

Eric Poch suggested that the questions to the safety officials might be of a more general nature than the rather specific questions the committee has posed thus far, arguing that it would make the task of the public safety officials more manageable. Jennifer Pincus countered that the more specific questions might actually be easier to answer. No attempt was made to make the questions more general at this time.

Pat Brown at this point entered into the record a report by Madeleine Gelsinon on sex offenders in Sudbury and the threat they may pose to children using the trail to get to school. Her data were obtained from the Sudbury Police Department. A significant number of sex offenders indicates that the utmost care must be taken in the management of the trail to ensure the safety of Sudbury's children. The report is attached to these minutes.

Bridget Hanson wondered why we are addressing crime on the rail trail, arguing that it would seem no different than crime elsewhere. Pat Brown offered that we really haven't been addressing crime and violence, which led Jim Nigrelli to ask permission to ask a question. His question was whether the RTCAC is going to look into studies of crime on rail trails. Pat responded that the committee would be responsible for that research. The RTCAC assumed responsibility for considering and responding to citizen questions concerning safety on the proposed trail during the summer of 2005, to insulate Sudbury Public Safety from performing extensive research on this subject.

The discussion then returned to Carole Wolfe's list of questions. It was generally felt that many of the questions, especially those which dealt with the resources the police might need to monitor the trails, parking lots and intersections, could not be answered at this time without knowing what the trail will be like and having no experience with it. The most likely answer would be that the department will do whatever is necessary. Question 9 on Carole's list concerning the placement of call boxes will be integrated into question 8 on the list of 10. There appeared to be no clear resolution of other questions she raised.

Preparation for the Public Information Meeting on September 14

The meeting will consist of talks before the entire assembly and poster presentations afterwards on the same topics, four in number. These are:

1. Maps of the trail and a general description of its physical segments and developmental phases. Jennifer Pincus will be in charge. FST will permit the use of its maps.
2. The process. How the development of the trails proceeds, where Sudbury is in this process for the north-south trail, and what will follow. Dick Williamson will be responsible for this presentation. Consideration of this topic gave rise to the following remarks: Pat Brown reiterated that the committee can not let the process drive our treatment of the issues, which must be thorough even though it might not fit the optimum timing for other considerations. Dick Williamson noted that the 25% design is not necessarily the next step in Sudbury. Jen Shemowat agreed noting that the wildlife study could take place before the 25% design. Bridget then urged FST to meet with Deborah Dineen and the Conservation Commission as soon as possible. She stressed that the concerns of the Conservation Coordinator were not always identical to those of the Conservation Commission,

and that the approval of one body did not guarantee that of the other. Pat raised the question of whether the RTCAC could ask the conservation commission about matters that fall outside the scope of the Engineering and Environmental Assessment. The RTCAC conservation subcommittee will be looking into these and will return with a list of environmental issues that should be addressed prior to proceeding with a trail design. These issues may be presented to the Board of Selectmen for consideration for CPC funding.

3. A report of the RTCAC survey conducted in 2005 of opinions and concerns of residents who live close to the rail bed about the rail trail. This report will be presented by Pat Brown.

4. Studies of rail trails throughout the nation have provided a great deal of information about how they have affected the communities that have them. Bridget Hanson will provide a summary of a significant number of those studies and the general conclusions to be drawn from them provided the conclusions meet with approval by the committee at the August 10 meeting. A list of the studies will be made available to the public.

Eric Poch asked why the public meeting had to be held in September. It was pointed out that the planned time is the date of the regular monthly meeting and that the main purpose is to get additional town input before the FST report that is scheduled in October. A request for CPA funds, due in October, might be desirable if the report is favorably disposed toward development of the trail. Dennis Mannone asked why the report to the town couldn't wait until after the FST study has been completed. The committee would be in a much better position to answer questions that the study has addressed. There were several responses to his question: Different issues will be addressed in the meeting; quality of life issues will be prominent at the town meeting; people are interested in the process, not merely the results; and this is not really a report to the BOS, but rather an attempt to inform the Sudbury citizens about the trail.

The discussion turned to the question of what the committee might do to get the townspeople out to the meeting. How should it be advertised? Eric Poch suggested that we take the meeting to the townspeople by broadcasting it on the local TV channel. That idea was quickly endorsed, and Bob Hall volunteered to contact Mark Thompson to see what must be done to videotape the meeting and broadcast it.

Items Not Covered on Tonight's Agenda

The reconsideration of trail studies was mentioned briefly in the present meeting: Bridget Hanson's review at the next meeting of published studies of rail trails and their effects on communities in which they are located. Bridget, together with Sigrid Pickering and Carole Wolfe, will also outline the desirable features of an environmental impact study to guide the FST assessment of such impacts.

Closing Remarks

Dick Williamson surprised the committee by tendering his resignation as its co-chair. As a prominent and very active member of the Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail he has been in a difficult position, a strong proponent of the trail obliged to temper his position in an effort to remain open to ideas on all sides of the issues as a chair person. He will remain on the committee and continue to champion development of the trail without guilt that he might be exerting undue influence on the process.

Several members of the committee expressed their gratitude for all of the work Dick has done for the committee, for his very considerable knowledge about rail trails, and his organizational skills. Everyone joined in a round of applause to thank him.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:40.

Pubic Comments

Jim Nigrelli asked if the RTCAC would reevaluate the report titled “Home Sales Near Two Massachusetts Rail Trails”, which is posted on the RTCAC website. He does not feel that its conclusions are justified because of the sampling methods employed and because it was written by Craig Della Penna who has been for many years an outspoken proponent of rail trails and is currently a real estate agent who owns property close to a rail trail. The hour was too late to commence a discussion of the issue, but it will be on the agenda for the next meeting.

Submitted on July 24 by Bob Hall

Approved on August 10, 2006