

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

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

Absent: Dennis Mannone, Eric Poch, Dick Williamson, 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:

The minutes of the meeting on January 12, 2006 were approved following clarification of the changes suggested by several members. The minutes of the meeting on February 9, 2006 were also approved following the addition of just one word.

Status of the Request for Proposals (RFP)

Pat Brown reported on the approval of the RFP at the meeting of the Board of Selectmen (BOS) on February 28 and distributed a timetable for the procedures to follow, which she received from the Town Manager, Maureen Valente. The RFP has been advertised in the local newspapers and listed on the Central Registry. Of primary importance to this committee is the requirement that this committee will evaluate the proposals, making an initial evaluation leading to the selection of three finalists by the week of April 10. The proposals will not be in the hands of the town Project Manager, Bill Place, until Friday, April 7 at 2:00 P.M. and will not be ready for distribution to the evaluation team until 5:00 P.M. that day. With holidays constraining meeting dates for the week of April 10, the committee decided to have its preliminary evaluation review on Monday, April 10, meaning that the proposals will have to be read over that weekend of April 8. All of the members present except Betty Foley, who will be away during that period, volunteered to be on the evaluation team. Dennis Mannone will be asked to join it, and Carole Wolfe, who is currently away, will be notified and asked if she wishes to join. The team will have at least 10 members. A second meeting will take place during the week of April 24 in which the finalists will be interviewed. A recommendation must be made in a memorandum delivered to the BOS by 5:00 P.M. on April 27. The contract will be awarded by the BOS at its meeting on May 2, 2006.

Before proceeding to the next item on the agenda Pat Brown reported that there was no news about a possible meeting with the BOS concerning the results of the RTCAC survey of abutters and other neighbors of the rail bed concerning their opinions and concerns about the proposed rail trail.

Rail Trail Safety

Pat Brown reviewed Maureen Valente's message regarding how the committee might question town safety officials about various safety issues. A judicious choice of questions that the committee has concluded are important will be welcome, given that police and fire officials are granted sufficient time to respond.

The committee then turned to the first of several documents posing questions about trail safety, which was selectman John Drobinski's power point presentation at town meeting last year in which he reported the BOS's approval of Article 43 to use \$25,000 of CPA funds for an initial feasibility study of the rail trail. From the list of issues selectman Drobinski indicated this committee would study, there were six safety issues: (a) security for abutters (b) security for users (c) dangers posed by motorized vehicles (d) curfew for the trail (e) safety at road crossings, and (f) safety of bridges. The discussion of these concerns led to a great many questions: about the need for safe parking lots, about the necessity for police patrolling, the equipment and personnel required to do that, how wide the trail must be to accommodate emergency vehicles, how many access points will they require. These in turn led to questions about distance markers along the trail so that people in trouble might know where they are in asking for help, and about ways to block entrances safely and effectively. The issues seemed for the most part to fall under two umbrella concerns: patrolling the trail and emergency responding, both kinds requiring important input from the town safety officials. The committee charged the Safety Subcommittee with ordering these concerns as questions that might reasonably be posed to police and fire officials, giving them 3-4 weeks to respond, and having a summary for presentation to the full committee by a scheduled May 11 meeting.

New Business

Discussion of USFWS study on the Effect of Cycling on Wildlife in the Assabet River Wildlife Refuge

The study was briefly discussed at the February 9 RTCAC meeting at which Sigrid Pickering suggested that predicting what the effects of cycling on wildlife might be along a new rail trail from what has been found along an already established trail is a questionable exercise, especially when the rail bed has been grown over for many years and wildlife has adapted to those conditions. Sigrid also lamented the possibility that with all of the other concerns about the rail trail, wildlife issues are not likely to receive much attention in the initial study. Those issues would better have been done prior to the initial study, preferably over several seasons. They should at least be done before the trail is built - if it is to be built. It was also pointed out that there are funds available from the Conservation Commission for the study of the turtles that are known to live along the rail bed. Sigrid suggested other changes that might have improved the RFP, all of them moot at this time since the request has already been published.

Pat Brown reported issues discussed at the BOS meeting, which included surveying plant and wildlife over at least two seasons, which might be done before or during the 25% design study. The committee agreed that a conservation biologist should be a part of the consulting firm hired to do the initial study, and now in spring time would be a good time to get started. A conservation biologist might do the work independently, and Bridget Hanson will inquire about that possibility.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 P.M.

Community Comments

Jim Nigrelli asked how many firms would receive the RFP. Bill Place pointed out that there are 24 eligible firms on the central list that is published, but many of those firms will not be interested because rail trails are not among their special interests or expertise. Mr. Nigrelli also asked if any of those consultants are especially interested in unpaved paths. His question could not be answered with certainty. He also inquired about the criteria for selection of the consulting firm, and it was pointed out that they are listed in the RFP. Finally he noted that "bad behavior" is not a major safety issue, but that "poor behavior" is, by which he meant

improper use, not intentionally disruptive, that results from people not paying sufficient attention to users around them, or children not properly trained how to use a multi-purpose trail.

Submitted by Bob Hall on March 17, 2006