

RAIL TRAIL CONVERSION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Town of Sudbury, Massachusetts
Minutes of Meeting on September 27, 2007

Present: Pat Brown, Betty Foley, Bob Hall, Bridget Hanson, Dennis Mannone (ex officio), Jennifer Pincus, Nancy Powers, Dick Williamson

Absent: Debbie Dineen (ex officio), Madeleine Gelsinon, Chris McClure, Bill Place (ex officio), Eric Poch and Carole Wolfe.

Community Input. There were no members present from the general public.

The meeting was convened at 8:00 p.m.

The minutes of the meeting on August 23, 2007 were approved with a few minor changes.

Old Business

Updates

Chairperson Pat Brown updated the Committee on three matters, having already sent the information in an email message to the members.

1. She had requested an update from the town manager, Maureen Valente, about the progress of the title search for the right of way (ROW) being conducted as the first of three projects funded by the CPC at Town Meeting in 2007. Maureen had received a letter from Town Counsel indicating that the title to the ROW was sufficient to enter into a lease agreement.
2. The RFP for the second project, the four-season wildlife study, had appeared in the Central Register, and two proposals had been received. They were reviewed by the Conservation Coordinator, the Town Planner, the Town Manager and (to some extent) the Conservation Subcommittee of the RTCAC. It seems likely that the company called 'Call of the Wild' will be awarded the project. The reviewers felt very positive about its principal investigator, Diane Boretos.
3. There has been no progress yet on the third study, the survey and wetlands delineation. Bill Place, Director of Public Works, will probably be asked to write the initial draft of the RFP. The survey may be initiated in the spring, a particularly good time to do it.

Pat also reported on her communication with Craig Della Penna concerning the deletion of the statistics in his real estate study published on the RTCAC website. Mr. Della Penna had no objection to the deletion and said that he had not had a chance to do anything more with the statistics. He believed that the only significant finding is the shorter selling time for properties near rail trails. The study will remain on the website without the deleted material.

Dick Williamson noted that there has been a great deal of discussion about the TIP (Transportation Improvement Program) list recently published for the period 2008-2011 in which the funds listed for Phase 2 of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (\$3,000,000) scheduled for 2011 are clearly inadequate. Tom Michelman, president of the Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail, had learned from the MPO that there had been no response from Sudbury indicating the need for funds. It was not known whether the town had received a request for a contact person who would be responsible for sending the information to the MPO.

Dick also commented on the state of the negotiations between the CSX railroad and the towns of Sudbury and Framingham regarding the purchase of the ROW from South Sudbury to almost Route 9 in Framingham (proposed phase 3 of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail). Sudbury apparently has not responded to recent requests for such negotiations.

Pat Brown indicated her unhappiness at learning how difficult it is to understand the process involved in the development of a rail trail. This process was described by Michelle Ciccolo at the September-10 meeting of the Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail. Michelle is assistant town manager in Hudson and was a prime mover in the development of the Assabet River Rail Trail. Pat's specific issue is the amount of lobbying and grass roots lobbying which Michelle strongly recommended and which are outside the documented process.

Mimi DiMauro, a resident and real estate broker in Sudbury, had requested a copy of the Minutes of the August RTCAC meeting before they were approved by the Committee. In keeping with the open-meeting laws Pat sent a draft of the minutes to her. Ms. DiMauro had also sent an article from the Boston Globe regarding a series of thefts and break-ins near the Nashua River Rail Trail. In Groton the crimes were at sites clustered near the rail trail, but in Pepperell and Dunstable that was not the case. A Groton police lieutenant, Cathi Welch, insisted that the rail trail has not become a locus of criminal activity and remains a safe family place. The article was duly noted.

Project Tracking for the Notebook

Pat Brown had sent an email to the BOS concerning the way they would like to receive progress reports on the Notebook, the comprehensive document regarding rail-trail development it had requested, and the BOS had not indicated any problems in the way she proposed. Dick Williamson wondered whether they would be interested in seeing drafts of sections. Bridget Hanson said the items would not require a great deal of discussion as they were merely compendiums of factual material. She suggested that we send whatever is available at the requested times for progress reports. The documents should be clearly labeled with a version identified by date.

Pat noted that she had sent the letter from the RTCAC to Cathy Lewis of CTPS regarding the RTCAC's criticism of the use of Rail-Trails and Safe Communities: the experience on 372 trails (Rails to Trails Conservancy, 1998) in the "Feasibility Study for the Proposed Extension of the Bruce N. Freeman Memorial Path in Sudbury and Framingham (CTPS, 2006)." The Committee had found a misleading and faulty use of a statistical comparison and approved the letter at its March 8, 2007, meeting. Pat sent the letter to Ms. Lewis by e-mail on September 25. Lewis had not responded to this e-mail.

Pat handed out a draft of another letter to the BOS asking them to consider the requirements of the rail trail when design decisions are made about the redesign of the town center and the Village Green development, both very near the location where the rail trail will cross Hudson road if it comes to pass. Bridget pointed out that the Village Green is not a town project; consequently, there is limited input the town will have toward its design. The rail trail and the town center redesign should be integrated. Copies of the letter to the BOS should be sent to Jody Kablack, the town planner, the Historic Districts Commission and the Sudbury Center Improvement Advisory Committee (SCIAC) urging discussion by all of the interested parties during the development of these projects.

Submission of the RTCAC Contribution to the Town Report

Pat had previously sent a draft of the Committee's report to its members. It was reviewed this evening and several changes were recommended. Pat will make the revisions and send it again, hoping that any additional changes can be made before the next meeting in order that a final copy can be signed by all members, as required, before it is submitted.

Subcommittee Reports

The Agricultural and Commercial Subcommittee had not met, but Dick Williamson noted that he has been trying to get information about rail trails that are adjacent or course through agricultural lands to help the Agricultural Commission see how problems posed by such developments have been handled in other communities. The Norwottuck River Trail is one he is pursuing.

The Conservation Subcommittee has not met, but Bridget has been reviewing "Massachusetts Wildlife Habitat Protection Guidance for Inland Wetlands". Chris McClure had provided to the RTCAC an electronic copy of that document, which will be used in assessing the impact of the rail trail in Sudbury. Bridget commented again on the question of whether MassHighway will be subject to the Sudbury Town Bylaws on environmental protection if the town builds the trail, and what effect on resources there might be if the town is the applicant and does the whole 100% design. It is clear that if the town is the applicant for the project the town bylaws do apply. Michelle Ciccolo at the September 10 Friends meeting said that the difference between the cost of the 25% design and the 100% design can be obtained as a grant using Transportation Enhancement funds. Although this would constitute a cost savings to the Town, then MassHighway would apply for the project permits and would not have to adhere to Sudbury Wetlands Administration Bylaws. The next question was what design differences and environmental benefits would result if the town did complete the 100% design and therefore adhere to the SWAB rather than the state environmental regulations. Bridget said she would look into this question.

Submission of Items for the Notebook

History of the RTCAC

The document submitted by Pat was approved, although there were a few modifications after the approval. She will make those modifications and send the document to Dennis Mannone who will keep it in a separate section of the Notebook file. The point was made that this is a "living document" that will very likely undergo additional modifications as the Notebook study proceeds. Final approvals are unnecessary at this time; that is, an incomplete version of a section may be approved by the RTCAC and posted even though it is understood that further additions and updates will be required later. Versions of posted items will be identified by the date on which they were approved by the RTCAC so that updates can be tracked.

Regional Overview

Pat had circulated a revision of the "Regional Overview" prepared by the Friends subcommittee of the RTCAC with several general changes, most notably a request for additional references and where possible, links to those documents. She does not believe the selectmen will read many of the references, but others will, so it is important to have the information readily available. Pat also had other reservations about some of the information included in the history,

and the Committee agreed that some of her criticisms were valid, others might not be. Dick Williamson agreed to work on the document again with Pat's questions in mind, and Bob Hall volunteered to help find missing references and links. Bridget was concerned about the use of so many acronyms, and the Committee decided that a Glossary would be included in the Notebook, perhaps most usefully at the beginning. The Glossary, which has not been updated since April, 2005, will have to be revised.

Public Information on Other Trails

There was no significant progress to report.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 p.m.

Submitted by Bob Hall on October 8, 2007

Resubmitted on October 19, 2007

Approved October 25, 2007