

RAIL TRAIL CONVERSION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Town of Sudbury, Massachusetts
Minutes of Meeting on February 28, 2008

Present: Pat Brown, Betty Foley, Madeleine Gelsinon, Bob Hall, Chris McClure, Dick Williamson, Carole Wolfe

Absent: Debbie Dineen (ex officio), Bridget Hanson, Dennis Mannone (ex officio), Eric Poch, Nancy Powers, Jennifer Pincus, Bill Place (ex officio)

Also Present: Resident Jim Nigrelli.

Community Input: Mr. Nigrelli had no comments at this time.

The Meeting was convened at 7:35 P.M.

Past Minutes: The minutes of the January 24, 2008 meeting were approved.

Old Business

Updates:

Project Status of CPC Studies

Pat Brown reported that nothing has been received yet from Call of the Wild, the consultant performing the wildlife study. Chris McClure said that he had been notified by Debbie Dineen that there will be a report of the winter data soon. Debbie emphasized to Chris that the study and the RTCAC's role in the process is not to design a trail, but only to gather data. Chris also reported that he had reviewed the list of questions regarding conservation issues and submitted it to the Conservation Commission (ConCom), which in turn submitted only those questions regarding wildlife to Call of the Wild. He said that the consultant's next scheduled walk on the rail bed will be on Monday, March 3rd, three days after the last snowfall, which allows Diane Boretos, the principal investigator, to detect the presence of various species in snow prints. Carole Wolfe asked if Diane uses cameras to detect animals on the rail bed. Chris did not know but said he would inquire. Pat indicated that she would like to know the nature of the data being collected, which, presumably, will become apparent in the winter report. Chris reiterated what Debbie Dineen had said, namely that Ms. Boretos is not an engineer and will not provide solutions to any problems she discovers, simply pointing to them in her role as a biologist. Pat opined that in retrospect the contract perhaps should have asked for suggestions of possible solutions.

Neither Pat nor Chris had received a reply from Maureen Valente, Town Manager, about a public hearing on the wildlife study. There was nothing new to report on the third CPA-supported study, the survey of present conditions along the right of way (ROW).

Other Meetings and Publications

Pat and Carole attended the second meeting of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Coordinating Committee (BRFTCC) on January 30th. In introductory remarks Lawrence Cash, chairman of the Committee and Phase 2 project leader, said that the Concord Rotary project, which includes Phase 2b of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT), will go ahead independently of Phase 2c of the BFRT in Concord.. Marcia Rasmussen, Director of Planning and Land Management in Concord, was asked to obtain some detailed information about the design of the rotary and the incorporation of the BFRT in that design, that is, details regarding the intersection of the two projects. Roland Bartl, Acton Town Planner, reported that the 25% design of Phase 2a (in Acton, Westford and Carlisle) was nearing completion, but a release agreement for the ROW had not yet been received from EOT. Without this it is not possible to proceed with the project initiation process with Mass Highway. It was pointed out that the towns along the BFRT are

responsible for 100% of the design costs, and that applications to MassHighway for construction costs require that responsibility to be met. The status of the 25% design in Concord was also discussed (see below).

Pat informed Mr. Cash about the status of the CPC studies in Sudbury, which cannot be completed until the four-season wildlife study is done, and that won't be until the fall of this year. Pat apologized to the Committee for making comments at the MassHighway meeting, which she felt she should not have done, first because she has no standing on the BFRTCC, and secondly because none of her comments had been cleared by the RTCAC. None of the RTCAC members present felt the apology was necessary, as she had done nothing more than relay some factual information.

Pat also attended a seminar held by the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) in Framingham on February 13, a "How To Seminar" about the TIP (Transportation Improvement Program) and how the TIP list is created. Hayes Morrison, a TIP Manager, led the program. Pat provided only a few of the salient points she walked away with. One is that the TIP process goes on in parallel with the MassHighway deliberations about the many projects in the mill. MassHighway is concerned with the design and construction aspects; the MPO process is concerned with the funding aspects (TIP). If the funding precedes the design process then the project is regarded as a conceptual one on the TIP. Ms. Morrison indicated that segmentation of the BFRT is not something the MPO can do. MassHighway decides what the project or projects will be, and MassHighway determines the cost estimates for the projects it approves. In this process the projects belong to the towns, and they have to push them through both the MassHighway process for design and construction and also the MPO process (the TIP deliberations) for funding. Morrison as TIP manager focused on the TIP process, stressing that the towns should have all their paper work in place, which the MPO will have seen before town representatives go before it, in order that brief effective presentations can be made during Municipal TIP Day. If a project has not been advertised by September 30, the end of the federal fiscal year, any federal matching funds allocated for that project revert from the state of Massachusetts to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Therefore, the state is very proactive in being sure that there are construction-ready projects advertised to use all available federal funding, and re-prioritizing projects based upon their construction-readiness as this deadline approaches. Pat noted that the Transportation Planning and Programming Committee at the MPO actually does most of the work in evaluating the proposals. The MPO works on a yearly schedule in its deliberations; MassHighway works on a quarterly schedule. Finally, Pat noted that while bicycle projects are eligible for CMAQ funds, there are no CMAQ funds set aside exclusively for bicycle projects.

The upcoming Town Meeting in Concord on April 28 was discussed briefly. There are four articles on the warrant that are concerned mainly with the 25% design of the trail in Concord. The BOS and the town's rail trail advisory committee favor the nearly completed 25% design by Vanasse, Hangen and Brustlin (VHB), which proposes an asphalt surface from its northern terminus at Route 2 south to the Assabet River, but a stabilized stone dust surface south of the river to the southern terminus short of the Sudbury line at Powder Mill Road. Two of the articles propose alternative plans, one by a private citizen from the Concord Greenway Alliance, the other by a group of advocates known as Rail Trails for Everyone. The latter favors an asphalt trail throughout its entire length, including all of Concord. The first of the four articles, the one submitted by the BOS, proposes submitting the VHB 25% design. Interestingly, the selectmen's article if approved will submit the design as proposed to MassHighway, and only "significant changes" will require further approval by Town Meeting. There was a presentation of the VHB design on February 12 at which comments, but not questions were entertained. Most of the comments were about the trail surface. A hearing on the design will take place on March 17 at the Alcott School.

Pat has not heard from the Sudbury BOS about her offer to present an update on the work the RTCAC has completed for the Notebook.

Project Tracking for the Notebook

Eric Poch was unable to attend the meeting and report on this item.

Subcommittee Reports:

Commercial/Agricultural Subcommittee

Madeleine Gelsinon reported on her meeting with Paul Cavicchio, and Mr. Cavicchio's concerns about the rail trail are documented in a letter to the RTCAC dated February 25, 2008. His major concerns are three: (1) He has to spray his plants with pesticides, and there are state regulations pertaining to his employees stating that no one is permitted entry to his fields for 3-4 hours after spraying. He does not know how he would contact trail users to keep them off the property in such cases. (2) Traffic poses a significant safety concern. Farm tractors and trucks, crossing the ROW on his property he estimates at 200 vehicles/hour. (3) Trespassing and theft will be difficult to guard against. Mr. Cavicchio's letter will be submitted to the Notebook. In his conversation with Madeleine he asked if rerouting the trail were a possibility. Madeleine was not prepared to say. Several cases where trails have been rerouted were mentioned. The 25% design for the BFRT in Acton calls for diverting the trail around Rex Lumber. This will not be difficult because the town owns the land in Nara Park. However, Carole understands that MassHighway does not want to pay the additional expense of doing that.

Madeleine will accept the few modifications to the list of questions to be asked of the town's farmers and distribute the list to RTCAC members.

Chris McClure had a chance meeting with David Dwayne of Methods Machine Tools and told him of the Committee's efforts to interview all of the commercial and agricultural entrepreneurs in town. Mr. Duane said that he had already stated his concerns, and unless there was something new that would have a bearing on his company there was little to be gained in another interview with him. Although the Agricultural Commission specifically requested interaction with the RTCAC, the commercial community has not. The Committee recognized the sense in Mr. Duane's request and will restrict its efforts to only those businesses that the RTCAC has not heard from. Businesses that have responded previously will only be asked if there are additional concerns to those included in Appendix C of the preliminary engineering assessment done in 2006 for the phase-2 trail in Sudbury by Fay, Spofford, and Thorndike.

Conservation Subcommittee

Chris had nothing new to add beyond the remarks he made at the beginning of the meeting regarding the wildlife study.

Submission of Items for the Notebook

Public Information on Other Trails

To begin with Pat noted that she was not sure how to organize the data on conservation issues that were obtained from conservation officers in several towns and approved for inclusion at the last meeting. Should those data be organized in a separate section of the Notebook or appear in the sections for the separate towns? The Committee decided that organization by towns for all kinds of information should be adopted.

Minuteman Bikeway

Pat recalled Bridget Hanson's comment at a recent meeting that conservation data for the Minuteman Bikeway would be useless, as the trail was constructed before state environmental regulations were in place. She then turned to the question of usage and the validity of the counts of trail users, several of which were noted in her report on this trail. At this point Dick Williamson reported on the meeting of the Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail on Tuesday,

February 26 at which Cathy Buckley Lewis of the MPO spoke about the extensive counts she had supervised on nine Massachusetts trails, the most recent being in the fall of 2007. The counts were all on weekends; the weather was variable, and there were a number of other uncontrolled variables that prompted many caveats. Her aim is to continue collecting such data on a regular basis, probably three times a year in the spring, summer and fall, under a variety of conditions until they will support a multivariate analysis that, hopefully, will disclose the relative importance of the various factors that determine trail usage. This could be used to create more accurate projections of trail use prior to trail construction and also to justify expenditures for expanded facilities on existing trails. Dick distributed copies of her tables, which will also be included in the Notebook. Carole said that the data should be pertinent to the wildlife study, and she thought that the ConCom hasn't really considered the impact of trail traffic on wildlife. She thinks also that many people do not appreciate the fact that the trail is a regional one, that is, with implications of heavier traffic than one would expect on a local trail. Dick talked briefly about several attempts, one in Salem, to devise formulas for predicting trail use. They have not been convincingly successful. On the other hand, there have been some encouraging similarities in the predictions in a few cases.

Pat will supply a link to the Globe article from which she obtained the timeline for the Minuteman Bikeway. Dick will continue his interviews with town officials along the trail, but he will not be at the next RTCAC meeting in March to report on them. The Globe article also reported that Arlington Police filed 18 reports of incidents along the Bikeway in 2006 but did not indicate the nature of all of them. The question arose at this point about the number of times the RTCAC website has been visited (hits). No one knew whether the site was set up to get that information, but Pat will inquire of Mark Thompson to find out. She will also ask Mark to remove outdated Notebook entries currently on the website, as they serve no useful purpose.

Organizational Issues

Pat has heard nothing further from Paul Griffin of the Park and Recreation Commission (Park&Rec) about providing a representative to the RTCAC following an extensive e-mail exchange on this subject that simply stopped without a response to her final set of questions. She will take up the question again with the BOS of either compelling attendance by or eliminating the requirement for a representative from Park&Rec on the RTCAC. A representative from Park&Rec was initially deemed important because the trail was seen as primarily a recreational facility. It appears, however, that the main interests of the Commission presently lie elsewhere. A new member will be appointed to the Commission this year by the BOS because no candidates have come forward for this elected position. Pat will ask the BOS to give favorable consideration to someone who has a strong interest in the trail and be willing to serve as a regularly attending Park&Rec representative on the RTCAC.

Meeting Schedule

Pat noted that the fourth Thursday in April occurs during school vacation and wondered if that would cause anyone difficulty. It apparently will not, but Jennifer, who has small children, was not present to indicate whether that will be a concern for her. The meeting is therefore tentatively scheduled for the fourth Thursday, April 24, but Pat will check with Jennifer.

Before adjourning Chris volunteered to interview members of the business community whose businesses are close to the trail if Eric is too busy to do that.

The Meeting Was Adjourned at 9:15 P.M.

Public Comments:

Jim Nigrelli asked if Cathy Buckley Lewis had said anything about a rationale for the locations at which the counts were made in the MPO survey, and whether she attempted to compare the most recent counts with counts made 10 years ago. She had not done either.

Submitted by Bob Hall on March 2, 2008

Revised by Pat Brown on March 9, 2008

Revised and resubmitted by Bob on March 20, 2008

Approved March 27, 2008