

RAIL TRAIL CONVERSION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Town of Sudbury, Massachusetts
Minutes of Meeting on September 22, 2011
Town Hall, Lower Level
322 Concord Road, Sudbury

Present: Pat Brown (chair), Madeleine Gelsinon, Bob Hall, Bridget Hanson, Jennifer Pincus, Nancy Powers, Dick Williamson, Carole Wolfe

Absent: Eric Poch

Also Present: Dan DePompei (Sudbury), Tom Michelman (Acton, F), Bob Armstrong (Concord, F), Lydia Rogers (Concord), Tom Connors (Needham, F), Emily Teller (Westford, F), Jim Nigrelli (Sudbury), Peter Alden (Concord)

An estimated 14 people were present in addition to the RTCAC. Not all spoke or signed in. Individuals who indicated membership in the Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail are marked "F".

The committee determined that Pat Brown would draft the minutes for this session.

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

Presentation – “Bring the Trail to Sudbury”

Tom Michelman, president of the Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail
The Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (the Friends) is a group of volunteer citizens working in partnership with state and local governments toward the completion of the proposed rail trail.

The Friends presented a proposal to the Sudbury Board of Selectmen in an e-mail dated June 29, 2011. This proposal was to “jumpstart the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) in Sudbury” by initiating a fundraising campaign to raise \$50,000 for the initial (25%) design of the BFRT for 0.5 miles in Sudbury from the Concord/Sudbury town line to the sidewalk along the south side of Route 117 (North Road), including a self-actuated signal at the 117 crosswalk. This would extend the BFRT into Sudbury, and would allow trail users to park at the Davis Field parking lot. This proposal was presented to the Board of Selectmen, as the policy making body for Sudbury, at its September 27, 2011, meeting; Mr. Michelman accepted an invitation to present it to the RTCAC for our information.

Although the design of the BFRT from Commonwealth Avenue to the Concord/Sudbury border is part of the fully-funded 100% design of phase 2C of the BFRT in Concord, the trail will be constructed south only to Powder Mill Road in Concord until Sudbury moves forward with design and construction of the trail in Sudbury. There is no access or parking at the Concord/Sudbury border, nor is there parking on or near Powder Mill Road. Concord proposes designated parking for the BFRT near the West Concord MBTA station, but none south of that aside from one handicapped space. The Friends' offer would be contingent upon the Town of Sudbury applying the funds toward the 25% design of a MassDOT-compliant trail, which mandates the design standards, construction methods, and funding mechanism of a federally funded transportation trail. It would benefit the Town of Sudbury by providing access to the trail in Sudbury; it would benefit the Town of Concord by permitting completion of the trail to the south Concord border; it would benefit trail users by making the Davis Field parking lot available for designated trail parking at the southern trail terminus.

Mr. Michelman stressed that if the 25% design results were unsatisfactory, the Town of Sudbury did not have to proceed with further design or construction: "If you don't like it, you can reject it." He estimated an additional \$60,000 to \$80,000 would be required to advance the half-mile of trail in Sudbury from 25% to 100% design, and said the funds for this could come from further private fundraising, grants, or Community Preservation Funds.

Questions and comments from the RTCAC members included:

Timing of trail construction: Phases 2A (Acton) and 2C (Concord) of the BFRT are programmed to receive construction funding during the 2021-2025 period in the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) developed by the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The Sudbury portion phase 2D of the BFRT extends 4.5 miles from the Concord/Sudbury border to the MBTA crossing near Route 20 along the Framingham/Lowell right-of-way. Phase 2B (the Route 2 crossing) connecting Acton and Concord is now a separate project proceeding to 25% design. Neither Phase 2B (the Route 2 crossing) nor Phase 2D (Sudbury) are currently listed in the LRTP because they have not achieved a 25% design; however there is no reason to expect construction to begin in Concord before 2021. The proposed extension from Concord into Sudbury, a part of 2D, would require the trail to be constructed in Concord.

Parking considerations: The Davis Field parking lot is perceived as a way to both advance the trail into Sudbury and a way to overcome the lack of any parking south of West Concord, and in particular terminating the BFRT at Powder Mill Road in Concord, where parking is prohibited. The extension into Sudbury would allow trail access with parking on Route 117 to Sudbury residents and to other trail users. The proposed Sudbury extension addresses a situation similar to that of the southern terminus in Westford of Phase 1 (Lowell, Chelmsford, Westford) of the existing BFRT. Because no parking was provided near the southern end, people park illegally, engendering complaints from abutters and concerns about user safety. The Selectmen of Acton, Carlisle and Westford have approved a plan to extend the trail 1700 feet from Westford into Acton where a parking lot is slated for construction. This is a sub-segmentation of Phase 2A (Acton); therefore, construction of this extension must be funded outside the federal process, and, therefore, the towns have applied for a MassWorks grant. Similarly, the extension proposed in Sudbury would require town staff to manage the project and to secure construction funding. The Sudbury Parks and Recreation Commission, which is responsible for Davis Field and its parking, has not responded to the proposal to extend the trail into Sudbury; they are conducting a study of recreational field use to determine their requirements and have not indicated how much parking will be required at Davis Field in the future.

Trail concept: The trail concept plan to be created by Sudbury Town Staff may not necessarily follow MassDOT trail design standards. Specifically, an investigation of conflicts and alternative alignments approved by 2010 Sudbury Town Meeting in article 42 has not been addressed. Environmental mitigation measures along the half-mile trail extension in Sudbury are discussed in the four-season wildlife study approved by 2007 Sudbury Town Meeting in article 23, and completed for the Town by Call of the Wild (the “COTW study”). The Friends’ offer is contingent upon creating a 25% design and submitting a MassDOT Project Need Form and Project Initiation Form.

Mr. Michelman mentioned that there were only two or three abutters. Madeleine Gelsinon asked whether he had contacted them concerning their views. Mr. Michelman replied that he had attempted to get in touch with the Maurers; they had not responded, but he knew they were not in favor of the proposition.

Presentation – Morse Wildlife Study

**Carole Wolfe, Daniel DePompei, Lydia Rogers and
Jim Nigrelli, president of Sudbury Citizens for Responsible Land
Stewardship**

Sudbury Citizens for Responsible Land Stewardship is a member-supported, community based resource focused on issues involving Sudbury's limited and valued natural resources.

Carole Wolfe, Jim Nigrelli and Daniel DePompei presented a study of the Bruce Freeman corridor in Sudbury and Concord by expert tracker and naturalist Susan Morse. This study (the "Morse study") had previously been presented to the Sudbury Board of Selectmen on August 16, 2011, accepted by the Board, and posted on the Sudbury Town website. It was arranged informally by an ad-hoc group of interested private citizens in Sudbury and Concord, and Ms. Morse agreed to do the work if compensated for out-of-pocket expenses. No specific contributors or sum were mentioned. The purpose of the study, as described by Ms. Rogers, was to look at how the trail will impact wildlife in the area of the trail and in the surrounding area. Mr. DePompei presented a summary of the COTW study done for the Town of Sudbury identifying areas where the proposed trail creates impacts that the study asserts cannot be mitigated; the Morse study was designed to provide additional expert data documenting the risk to wildlife associated with the design or construction of any trail. The Morse study includes an extensive bibliography of peer-reviewed literature on the effects of humans and recreation upon wildlife, a further list of suggested reading, and a pair of annotated maps indicating wildlife signs and sightings along the Bruce Freeman corridor in Concord and Sudbury. The Morse study concludes that the corridor provides valuable connections for fragmented wildlife habitat that will be greatly diminished or destroyed by its use for human recreational activity.

Questions and comments included:

Actual wildlife numbers: The Morse study does not make clear how many individual animals were sighted, or when. This, it was explained, is an extremely difficult and expensive measurement to make. The maps at the end of the Morse study contain the only hard observational data concerning animal signs (tracks, scat, and so forth) and sightings (actually seeing the animal) of the corridor. It's very difficult to quantify how extensively the corridor is used from this information. Legends for the maps were cut off in the posted version of the document; Pat and Carole will have that corrected. The text of the document is more general, discussing potential wildlife disruption in light of the literature.

Value of the corridor: The actual corridor is quite narrow, and the question was raised how much actual use by animals it gets. The utility of the corridor, as Ms.

Rogers explained, is in linking other open spaces along its length, connecting otherwise fragmented habitats.

Tradeoffs with recreational uses: There was a general lack of agreement on how great the negative impact on wildlife would be. Peter Alden, a Concord resident and a naturalist, lecturer, ecotourism guide and author of books on wildlife, stated that he didn't believe there would be any significant impact on wildlife use of the corridor because trail users would move during the day and wildlife would move at night. Emily Teller, a member of the board of the Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail and a Westford resident, described the great recreational value she finds on the completed section (Phase 1) of the trail in Chelmsford and Westford. Ms. Rogers believed that the disruption of wildlife along the corridor would be extensive, and that the corridor was vital to permitting wildlife to move throughout the region while recreational opportunities were more widespread. In the end, the Morse report supplies information supporting Ms. Myers opinion. In the absence of more definitive information the tradeoffs between wildlife and recreation are value judgments supplied by voters.

Minutes: The Minutes of the meeting on May 2, 2011, were approved unanimously.

Old Business

Request for determination by Conservation Commission

At the March 24, 2011, RTCAC meeting Bridget had volunteered to review a trail design with Sudbury Conservation Commission (Con Com) using the MassDOT guidelines [a firm-surface trail (paved or stabilized stone dust) 10 to 12 feet wide with a two-foot shoulder on each side] in something akin to a predesign meeting with a developer, to identify areas in which Con Com might have concerns. Conservation Coordinator Debbie Dineen declined to hold this discussion, pointing out that no wetlands delineation has been done for the right of way and that it is too far in advance of any formal permitting. RTCAC had been informed of this by e-mail on June 13, 2011.

Status of concept plan

Town Planner Jody Kablack indicated that Town Staff has spent no time on the concept plan in an e-mail message to the RTCAC on September 19, 2011.

Status of CSX Negotiations

Town Planner Jody Kablack indicated that no progress had been made in negotiations with CSX and the Town would be requesting an extension in November.

Organizational Matters

Membership

Betty Foley resigned from the RTCAC on August 21; the Board of Selectmen accepted her resignation from the RTCAC on September 21. The RTCAC is now composed of nine at-large members.

Date of next meeting

The RTCAC approved a meeting date of October 27, 2011.

Proposed Agenda Items

The RTCAC plans to have a submission for the 2011 Sudbury Town Annual Report ready for approval and signing at its next meeting.

The Meeting was adjourned at 8:50 P.M.

Community Input

Daniel DePompei reiterated that the Town needs to consider what the conflicts along the Bruce Freeman corridor are, particularly those identified in the COTW study, and to address those conflicts as directed by the 2010 Town Meeting when it approved article 45.

Respectfully submitted by Pat Brown September 30, 2011

Resubmitted October 6, 2011

Approved October 13, 2011