



Town of Sudbury

Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Advisory Task Force

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MINUTES

DECEMBER 15, 2022 AT 7:00 PM

VIRTUAL MEETING

Members Present: Chair John Drobinski, Laurie Eliason, Richard Morse, Glenn Pransky, and Frank Vitale

Members Absent: Vice Chair Lana Szwarc, John Sugrue, and Associate Member Richard Williamson

Others Present: Director of Planning and Community Development Adam Duchesneau and Nick Lapointe of Fuss & O'Neill, Inc.

Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Project Design, Permitting, and Construction Update

Mr. Drobinski provided opening comments and updates. The intent of the meeting would be to receive an update on Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) work above the diamond and discuss further plans for south of the diamond (considering both the quarter mile section of the rail trail south of the Mass Central Rail Trail (MCRT) down to Boston Post Road/Route 20 and then extended to Framingham). Framingham recently purchased the CSX corridor, and Sudbury will also need to consider the MCRT corridor with an estimated timeline of late 2024/early 2025 which is a similar timeline to the BFRT.

In follow-up to the October 27, 2022 meeting, Mr. Lapointe joined the meeting as the consultant from Fuss & O'Neill, Inc. Fuss & O'Neill will advise the Town on how to best to progress the BFRT beyond the diamond. Mr. Lapointe provided updates that the engineers had not been onsite yet, but work should begin soon depending upon the snow. The pre-construction meeting took place in Worcester. Mr. Lapointe expressed he felt confident as they are used to complex projects and should have good attention to detail. There was initially a large pool of bidders (approximately 12 potential, 9 submitted), and all parties seem pleased with selection. The bid price was within 3% (under) of office estimate. The top four bidders were close which validates a good set of bids.

Construction Sequence and Plan: Mr. Lapointe said it is likely construction will begin in Concord north of North Road, with pour in place on the cattle crossing area, but this may be amended based on site walks and clearing. Final clearing and construction schedule had not been submitted yet. Fuss & O'Neill, Inc. and contractors will start monthly meetings which will likely become more frequent in Spring when full construction season will begin. In the future the contractors will provide schedule update memo to the Town that can be posted to the website.

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) process will have a fulltime engineer and inspector on site every day. Fuss & O'Neill, Inc. will also have engineers monthly in the beginning (e.g., photo logs), specific aspects, RFIs, issues, etc. Fuss & O'Neill, Inc. also available for consultation on hourly basis for updates.

Next Phase BFRT Extension: The critical path will be the extension through Route 20 including crossing the state highway layout. This will include new hurdles and processes compared to Mass rail property. Three components involving Fuss & O'Neill, Inc. will be very important in decisions: 1) The traffic assessment with much of the analysis already completed 2) Environmental decisions where necessary information will be provided soon 3) Right of way: may be less of a challenge in this phase as the Town of Sudbury owns corridor up to Route 20.

Key questions for the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Advisory Task Force: 1) How fast do we want the next phase to be done to Route 20 (may be one or more phases)? 2) How much money does the Town have to contribute to design? and 3) How much money do we have for construction funding? If a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) approach is taken, it should not be an issue. Local funding if the Town decides to construct ¼ mile on own also does not seem to have barriers through Community Preservation Act funding.

Environmental consultant has finished fieldwork and the wetlands mapping is done. Fuss & O'Neill, Inc. expects to have mapping/environmental information soon that should be used to inform the next approach.

Per the traffic analysis results, it appears there can be an at grade crossing, and the BFRT would not need a cross overhead or tunnel. At this time, it appears the crossing can be at Nobscot Road. Analyses have been able to rule out the need to modify multiple signals/intersections. However, the current signal would need to be improved for ADA needs and timing. Mr. Lapointe felt this should be considered manageable and lower cost compared to an overpass or tunnel. In summary, currently traffic and crossing does not appear to be a barrier for BFRT at Route 20, though MassDOT funding would be needed.

Fuss & O'Neill has not approached MassDOT, but at this time does not think they would be concerned because this would upgrade the intersection and would likely not impact other roads. They need to go through a justification process/report to justify why appropriate to cross at grade. Even if BFRT 1/4 mile is a Town-funded project, Sudbury will still need a Mass Highway access permit and funds.

Mr. Pransky stated he was surprised that overhead was not recommended. Mr. Lapointe agreed that there are benefits (no impact to traffic or users), but this can result in large delay to project. An overhead path may also require zig-zagging to access the path, as well as likely further maintenance. Mr. Pransky also asked whether MassDOT would consider improvements on Route 20 during this work to increase safety of current situation (e.g., better pedestrian crossing at Union Avenue/Route 20). Mr. Lapointe confirmed that as soon as the BFRT aims to cross

Route 20, there needs to be an evaluation of the location and likely construction, working with MassDOT to improve sidewalks and accessibility.

Mr. Lapointe recommended the Town approach MassDOT for improvements regardless of the approach (short-term improvements such as sidewalks, signals, other safety and accessibility improvements). In the future the Town and the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Advisory Task Force could take as an action item to consider what short-term improvement requests could be presented to MassDOT. The fact that this is the intersection of the MCRT and BFRT should provide further justification to make improvements and improve access to the trails.

In general, the Town should consider various aspects early in the project including identifying the areas the BFRT would like to connect in, where have dedicated parking (e.g., preliminary but may be able to have 10-20 perpendicular spaces on sliver parcel of land right off Nobscot Road), etc. This would relieve the burden on parking in the plaza. Other locations are also being considered as part of concept phase.

There was discussion about the hypothetical scenarios to move forward. The process will take a minimum of three years, the return on the investment on design just to Route 20 would be low. The scenarios could include: 1) the Town constructs to Route 20 and then use TIP for extension to Framingham; 2) the Town uses the TIP process for the full remainder from diamond to Framingham; or 3) a last consideration could be to use the TIP process for the last quarter mile and the Route 20 intersection, which would be more complex with MassDOT involvement and better justify TIP process.

Discussion ensued about whether it is necessary to involve Framingham now. Mr. Lapointe said it is necessary to have a logical terminus for MassDOT to fund the work. Sudbury has such a terminus at Eaton Road with close proximity to Framingham. However, Sudbury can still engage with Framingham, and the Director of Planning there had already reached out.

The Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Advisory Task Force and Mr. Lapointe discussed having a meeting early in 2023 to review the final results and recommendations. Mr. Lapointe expressed there would be ample opportunities to submit for a TIP. We should also have a full understanding of needs/amenities and be committed when we submit an application. Mr. Drobinski said we should consider the needs carefully as this is a very unique and critical section of the BFRT. Mr. Lapointe said he would bring specific concept plans to the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Advisory Task Force for comments. He also said we are fortunate to have a MassTrails Grant to further support the work.

Mr. Pransky also asked Mr. Lapointe if he could send his slide deck to him for consideration. Mr. Lapointe said he could receive/review and will share future stories and insights in the future. All information should go through Mr. Duchesneau.

The Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Advisory Task Force was asked if they were supportive of pursuing Community Preservation Act project funding at the May 2023 Annual Town Meeting to further progress the BFRT south of the diamond for design and/or construction. The funding is

meant to be flexible to allow for different BFRT scenarios selected. The Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Advisory Task Force felt that the funds would benefit the BFRT and decisions will be made on the best approach.

Mr. Pransky made a motion for the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Advisory Task Force to support the \$300,000 CPA funding request for the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail section south of the Mass Central Rail Trail as submitted by Town staff for design and construction purposes. Mr. Morse seconded the motion.

Len Simon of 40 Meadowbrook Circle asked for the motion to be modified to state the funds are for the pursuit of the BFRT south of the diamond and to consider removing the term ‘construction’ in the article if the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Advisory Task Force did not feel the funds would not be used for this purpose. Mr. Duchesneau expressed a desire to keep the article as flexible as possible at this time and keep both “design” and “construction”. He clarified that a separate article is going to Town Meeting to provide funding for a matching of a MassTrails Grant. Mr. Drobinski expressed gratitude for the citizen comment. The Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Advisory Task Force decided to keep motion flexible.

Roll Call Vote: Mr. Drobinski – Aye, Ms. Eliason – Aye, Mr. Morse – Aye, Mr. Pransky – Aye, and Mr. Vitale – Aye.

General Public Comments

As part of earlier discussion, Mr. Simon clarified that the extension below the diamond and through Route 20 could be considered for the TIP approach. Mr. Lapointe confirmed he felt this could be a reasonable and favorable cost-benefit approach if the Route 20 crossing is included with the TIP. The Town-funded project would likely need to end at Route 20 without crossing. Mr. Simon expressed the time difference between both approaches may not warrant the Town expenditure. Mr. Simon also stated agreement that MassDOT may be supportive of Route 20 improvements. Discussion generally concluded that tying in the next BFRT extension into/across Route 20 is a critical component.

Member Report on Rail Trail Observations

Mr. Pransky presented slides he had prepared with an aerial view of the Route 20 intersection. The slides included the questions and options that had been discussed. He also provided information on a 2019 survey of MCRT in Wayland. Results showed many users are close by though many opt to drive to the trail. Wayland liked that the MCRT was accessible and there was ample parking. In Sudbury we need to think about how we can have parking close to the diamond. Chiswick Place may be a potential parking location. Other possibilities are Station Road (not recommended) or Sudbury Farms. Other challenges are places for water, bathroom, or places to sit. At present Sudbury Coffee Works is the main option, unless one travels down Union Avenue without sidewalks. Improvements around Route 20 might change things. Whole Foods is located ½ mile down MCRT. Sudbury Farms requires crossing Route 20 but is a busy parking lot. Mr. Pransky suggested the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Advisory Task Force consider

the presented information as they make decisions about the timing and process for extending the trail. Funding for MassDOT improvements on Route 20 can help make the area more pedestrian and biker friendly.

Mr. Drobinski asked the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Advisory Task Force to think about whether Sudbury should start discussions with landowners (e.g., Chiswick Park, Sudbury Farms, etc.) about access points or parking consideration. Mr. Pransky suggested to have a plan well developed before starting discussions with MassDOT, including potential connections to the MCRT. One example to consider is to widen the bridge on Hop Brook which could help access to Mill Village.

Mr. Simon stated that to tie in with parking discussion there is still the defunct gas station on Nobscot Road that might be able to be used for a pocket park or parking. It is currently privately owned. Mr. Duchesneau said he would follow up with Mr. Lapointe to see if he felt the state may be amendable to assisting the Town in acquiring the parcel of land. It was generally agreed that a lot could be gained into looking into this issue.

Closing Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Advisory Task Force Comments: Mr. Morse stated he was in agreement with the parking discussion and partnering with MCRT including a bridge to Mill Village and stores. Mr. Vitale suggested that we should consider further the three scenarios discussed and be able to compare the pros and cons, to support further recommendations. Mr. Drobinski agreed with the exercise so that we can give the best advice possible to benefit people in Sudbury and in the Commonwealth. He expressed gratitude for attendance and wished the attendees and audience happy holidays.

Minutes for Approval: October 27, 2022

Mr. Pransky made a motion to approve the minutes of October 27, 2022. Ms. Eliason seconded the motion. Roll Call Vote: Mr. Drobinski – Aye, Ms. Eliason – Aye, Mr. Morse – Aye, Mr. Pransky – Aye, and Mr. Vitale – Aye.

Administrative Report

There were no topics discussed under this item.

Mr. Drobinski adjourned the meeting at 9:02 PM.