

Meeting with DCR – Feb. 9, 2011

A meeting was held at DCR headquarters on 251 Causeway Street in Boston between members of Squannacook Greenways and DCR representatives on Feb 9, 2011 at 2 pm. This meeting was arranged with relatively short notice. In attendance from Squannacook Greenways were Peter Cunningham, Joan Wotkowicz, Steve Meehan, and Bill Rideout. In attendance from DCR were Conrad Crawford (Director of Partnerships), Tom LaRosa (Acting General Counsel) and Dan Driscoll (Director of Recreation and Facility Planning).

Tom LaRosa stated that DCR had finally signed the MBTA lease for the Mass Central Rail Trail between Waltham and Bolton. Tom gave us a hard copy, which I converted to a pdf minus the numerous Plan of Property maps. (http://sqgw.org/pdf/lease_dcr_mass_central_dec_2010.pdf). DCR's vision for this trail would be that they would build the trail as money became available, but that the individual towns would take over all operations and maintenance. They noted that none of the money to build the trail was immediately available.

We then discussed our overall vision. DCR had some confusion at first as to whether we were representing municipalities or a non-profit; we made it clear that we were a non-profit trying to follow the lead of Wachusett Greenways, even down to our name, Squannacook Greenways. We reiterated that our group would be responsible for building, operating, and maintaining the rail trail. We noted strong support in our towns for the rail trail as evidenced by the vote in Townsend.

Next Dan Driscoll spoke about his feelings about the municipalities that were building rail trails with Iron Horse Preservation Society. Dan expressed frustration that they not following the environmental best management practices as laid out in <http://www.mass.gov/dep/cleanup/laws/railtrai.doc>. He said he was unhappy especially with their road crossing designs that lacked signage and a painted crosswalk. He noted that he preferred asphalt or stabilized stonedust trails, although he admitted stone dust trails could also be done using those same best management practices. Dan said he believed we would need to follow public bidding, or at least follow prevailing wage rules.

Bill Rideout noted that we have had a long relationship with Steve Winslow, who was one of the authors of those best management practices. We agreed that good road crossing design was critical. Bill asked Dan if a stabilized stone dust trail could be maintained by volunteers without specialized equipment, and Dan said it could not. Bill noted that our model was not the towns building their trails for free with Iron Horse, but instead our model was Wachusett Greenways, and that we were expecting a quality stonedust trail to cost 50 to 100K/ mile, as was Wachusett Greenways' cost, albeit partially offset by monies from rail reclamation. Dan agreed that the Wachusett Greenways approach was one he considered reasonable.

Dan also noted that what a trail was called made a difference in the rules it needed to follow. Rules for rail trails are more stringent than rules for greenways. He said we might want to consider renaming our trail a greenway.

Tom LaRosa noted that our group would need to have a certain level of liability insurance to meet the requirements of the MBTA lease. He noted that the recreational use statue gave us a certain amount of protection, but that some insurance would still be required. He also noted that the contractors that built the trail would be required to have certain levels of insurance as specified in the lease.

Conrad suggested he would also like to consult with Ed Torcoletti and Bruce Colburn, the local DCR team, about this proposal.

We discussed various possible extensions to the trail, both north toward NH and south toward Ayer. We also discussed possible interconnection with the Nashua River Rail Trail. We discussed whether we should lease the entire abandoned rail bed, or just the section we were planning to start with. Tom suggested just leasing the section we were prepared to develop, and then the rest later, as long as there were only one or two more sections.

We discussed rail trail policy. They noted that the parks side of DCR does not allow hunting on rail trails, and so they expected we would follow that policy. They had no problems with hunters using the rail trail to access legal hunting areas. The other policy they desired was dawn to dusk use. They noted that the official policy is that the trail can be used after dusk, but not for loitering. That is, users had to be in motion. Finally, non-official motorized use would not be allowed.

We discussed our interaction with Natural Heritage about the Blanding Turtles. They were satisfied with that interaction.

We agreed that the major action item would be to draft a memorandum of agreement. DCR suggested we draft the first draft, keeping in mind it would need to satisfy the basic requirements in the MBTA lease they recently signed.

We also discussed the particular situation of Harbor Auto Body.

Finally, Joan gave Conrad the binder of documentation we had produced as a group, and he seemed quite impressed.

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