

Squannacook Greenways meeting notes

7/28/11 7:00 pm

Nashua River Watershed Association, Groton, MA

Attending: Peter Carson, Mark Cram, Bruce Easom, Bob Hargraves, Ray Jackson, Steve Meehan, Cara Sanford (AmeriCorps/NRWA), Bill Rideout, Joan Wotkowicz

Review of and follow up to the DCR meeting held July 7th between the Squannacook Greenways Committee (SG) and the Ed Lambert, DCR Commissioner – It was generally agreed that convincing Ed Lambert of the group's conviction and stability was our goal. The group discussed a plan to get letters of support to submit to the DCR. Bob Hargraves will draft a template letter of common talking points and email it to the group. Group members will then make additions at the next meeting. Some of the talking points brought up at the meeting were:

1. The group has been working on this for eight years already.
2. The trail has the potential to be part of a 32 mile long contiguous trail system (including the Nashua River Rail Trail and the Mason Rail Trail).
3. The group has strong ties to the NRWA, with a 40 year track record of accomplishment.
4. The group has strong ties with Wachusett Greenways, a non-profit that successfully built and maintains a stone dust rail trail on DCR land.
5. The group has already won a DCR trails grant for \$20K and completed an environmental and engineering study with FST.
6. Groton has already put CPA money into the trail.
7. Townsend voters supported the rail trail 1021-259 in a non-binding ballot vote.
8. The trail is not just for recreation, but also provides a safe alternative to the bike-unfriendly Route 119 in Townsend.
9. The committee has shown flexibility in dealing with abutter issues in the Townsend/South Road area.

The group started to divvy up who would talk to whom in getting letters of support. Joan asked if these letters of support might also serve "double duty" for the DCR grant application. The group decided it would. The letter template used for letters of support outreach should also reference as one of its "talking points" that the SG was applying for a DCR grant. The list is:

1. Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell – NRWA (Al Futterman)
2. State Rep Sheila Harrington (Bob Hargraves)
3. Former State Rep Bob Hargraves (Bob Hargraves)
4. State Senator Eileen Donoghue (Peter Cunningham)
5. State Senator Jen Flanagan (?)
6. Congresswoman Tsongas (?)
7. Congressman Olver (?)
8. Senator Brown (Bob Hargraves)
9. Senator Kerry (?)
10. Ed Yaglou - Wachusett Greenways, Chairman of MCRT task force (Bill Rideout)
11. Colleen Abrams - President, Wachusett Greenways (Bill Rideout)
12. Groton BOS members (Peter Cunningham)
13. Edward Torcoletti and Bruce Colburn, DCR (Joan Wotkowicz)
14. Emily Norton, Friends of Willard Brook (Ray Jackson)
15. Liz Fletcher - Mason Railroad Trail (Bill Rideout)
16. Charles Martin - president of the New Hampshire Rail Trails Coalition (Bill Rideout)

17. Bob Plamondon – Chairman of Townsend BOS (Steve Meehan)

18. Jennifer Ducey (formerly Shemowat) and John Hendrickson – FST (Bill Rideout)

It was planned that at the next meeting the remaining names would be assigned, and more names might be added. The talking points letter would also be finalized then.

Bruce Easom mentioned that he believed Ed Lambert had suggested at the meeting that the DCR would like to pass environmental liability along to our group. Bill Rideout said that he believed Ed had been referring to general liability, not environmental liability. We agreed this important issue should be clarified, since we are not able to accept environmental liability.

DCR grant application - October 1 is the DCR grant deadline. Joan said she has made good headway but would like to hammer out the details this month. The grant application needs to be submitted by a 501(c)3, but we would not have time to complete that process before Oct. 1st. Joan noted that the NRWA has offered to be the fiscal agent for this application. Joan has been using the FST document (2008 draft Squannacook River Rail Trail Environmental and Engineering Assessment) to supply much of the needed data for the application. The grant application requires the creation of a specific task list (items such as person hours, tools, materials, cost, etc). Bill Rideout said that he and Mark Cram would talk informally with Gary Shepherd, one of the potential project bidders, with questions about formulating a proposed task list, as well as consult him about questions about wetlands permitting. Joan said that grant recipients would be announced in Spring 2012.

We discussed permitting with the local conservation commissions under the State Wetlands Protection Act and the Local Wetlands Bylaws prior to work starting. Any work within the 100-foot buffer zone or the 200-foot Riverfront Area (RFA) would need to be conditioned by the conservation commission. Bruce Easom said that he believed both the conservation commissions would require a notice of intent to be filed, a process that typically requires the help of an engineering firm. We discussed implications this might have for our grant proposal. The existing plan was to use the grant money to pay for construction from Bertozzi to South Road. An alternative would be to use this round of grant application money to pay for a wetlands scientist to delineate, flag, and map the wetlands and complete the local and state wetlands permitting, which might also include filing with the Natural Heritage for Endangered Species Program. This work would include that entire 3.7 mile proposed rail trail. We felt that an engineering study will be needed to address wetlands permitting before work near wetlands project can proceed. There was general consensus that this grant should focus on wetlands issues. We considered also doing a small section of the trail outside of any wetlands area just to build interest, such as the section between the two Crosswinds Drive crossing.

Bill Rideout agreed to talk with Jennifer Ducey from FST and to Gary Shepherd about costs of such a wetlands study, and also a demonstration trail section. We also discussed the possibility of having volunteers remove trees from the non-wetlands sections as a way of making our required in-kind match. Ray Jackson expressed concern about access to and control over the project area and whether the volunteers would fall under the DCR's volunteer management policy, which is currently being revised. Bill Rideout said he did not believe that would be the case, but ultimately our relationship with DCR would be determined by the memorandum of agreement. We also discussed whether volunteers would use power tools or hand tools. Bill Rideout said the insurance costs would be one factor in that decision.

Discussion of implications of abandonment in Ayer center – We discussed whether we knew anyone in Ayer interested in the rail trail. It was mentioned that Bob Hargraves, who had left the meeting early, might have a contact. Members decided to table the discussion until the next meeting.

Feedback/update on bylaws – We decided that incorporating would also increase our credibility with DCR, so we plan to move ahead as soon as possible. We discussed the feedback given by the attorney friend of

Rollin Willis. Pete Carson said he would use that feedback to create another draft of the bylaws, which he would send to the group. It was planned to incorporate after discussing the new draft at the next meeting.

The next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, August 25 at 7 pm at the NRWA.