

Squannacook Greenways meeting notes

6/30/11 7:00 pm

Nashua River Watershed Association, Groton, MA

Attending: Bruce Eason, Al Futterman, Peter Cunningham, Bob Hargraves, Ray Jackson, Steve Meehan, Cara Sanford (AmeriCorps/NRWA), Rollin Willis, Joan Wotkowicz, Bill Rideout (on speaker phone)

1. Update on discussions with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)

The draft agreement was sent to Conrad Crawford in February/March 2011. Peter got in touch with the Chief of Staff of the new commissioner, Lisa Bishop. The new DCR Commissioner Ed Lambert will meet with reps of our Squannacook Greenways (SG) group on Thursday July 7 at 10:30 am, Groton Town Hall office. The group will want to convince the commissioner to proceed with a commitment for the DCR to lease the land from the MBTA which SG would then develop as a rail trail. Wachusett Greenways is a model to an extent but in this case the DCR doesn't already own the land.

The group discussed how the recent announcement that the MBTA is abandoning the Greenville Branch line from Ayer Center to West Groton provides enormous potential to expand the rail trail in the future. Peter will contact PolyOne in Ayer regarding their use of the rail line re: abandonment.

When talking with Commissioner Lambert we will want to pitch the potential for the Squannacook River Rail Trail to make a connection with the Nashua River RT, as connectivity is a big selling point. [Bruce volunteered to do the GIS mapping of how the proposed Squannacook River Rail Trail (SRRT) would connect to the commuter rail and to the Nashua River Trail.]

When talking with Commissioner Lambert, emphasize how the Wachusett Greenways is a model and that we are striving towards that standard. Bill and Bruce will bring visual aids, including a poster-size map. Address in the meeting the vision of what the Squannacook Greenways Committee is doing, its MOA with the DCR, and the 501c3 status. Ask Commissioner Lambert to instruct General Counsel LaRosa to talk to the MBTA and negotiate a lease.

The group discussed Ray's question about volunteers working on the rail trail and whether the property would need to be part of the DCR's draft volunteer policy. Because the Squannacook Greenways is not going to be working on state owned land this policy does not apply. The MOA states that the land lease is between the DCR and the MBTA and it is Squannacook Greenways that constructs and maintains the trail. Al suggested that the DCR may want to take on the construction and maintenance of the rail trail (in which case SG would be a stewardship group) and Peter agreed that it was worth asking at the July 7 meeting with the Commissioner. On the other hand, this could considerably delay the process and would likely not be a good route to pursue.

The group decided to limit the MOA and discussion with Commissioner Lambert to the currently proposed area, not its expansion.

2. Debrief of the Townsend Conservation Commission meeting –

Ray discussed the Rail Trail project at a conservation commission meeting and introduced Squannacook Greenways and its plan to eventually file a Notice of Intent (NOI). He answered questions, chiefly around erosion controls and the location of the wetlands. Bill will ask Karen Chapman to do up a wetlands map of the proposed site. The ConCom membership seemed a little uncertain about who the Squannacook Greenways group was, their role versus the state's in the project, and whether the trail, as stone dust, was porous or not.

3. Discussion of the DCR 2012 Recreational Trails grant –

Joan is leading the writing of the grant, which is due this October. She asked a series of questions to the group to inform the grant-writing process. The Squannacook Greenways will be asking for \$50K, and has received \$20K in a past successful DCR Recreational Trails grant application. Bill sent out a blank grant application for committee members to review prior to today's meeting. The grant will need to explore the potential for connection to the Nashua River Rail Trail. Bruce will do the GIS mapping for the grant, which will include a topo map overlaid onto the shapefile of trail locations. It will include a letter of intent (in lieu of a letter of commitment). The proposal will be for a 3.7 mile trails with a Phase I request to fully construct 1.3 miles through this grant-funding round. The trail must be non-motorized and the application will need to spell out the various user groups. The SCORP (Massachusetts Outdoors 2006) will need to be referenced as justification for the rail trail. Bill and Mark will attempt to get a better \$\$ estimate by consulting with potential bidder Gary Shepherd. Someone suggested that when it comes time to do the work, the DOC has a prisoner release system which might be of use.

4. The next meeting is Thursday July 28th at 7 pm at the NRWA

Written by Cara Sanford