

Squannacook River Rail Trail Funding Exploration Committee

Minutes of Public Meeting of Aug 20, 2009 (Approved Oct 14, 2009)

Location: Memorial Hall, Townsend

Time: 7 pm

Members Present: Steve Meehan (Chairman), Bill Martin, Hirk Fortin, Bill Rideout (Secretary)

Members Absent: Ken Gerken

Attendees: Bruce Easom, Peter Cunningham, Peter Carson, Steve Legge (Groton committee)

The meeting was brought to order at 7:09 pm. The first agenda item was the Project Need Form status. Peter Cunningham reported that the Townsend letter of support had been hand-delivered by Greg Barnes to Mark Haddad in Groton. Mark said he should be able to send the form to Arthur Frost of MassHighway District III in about a week. Peter Cunningham said he would follow-up with MassHighway sometime after they received the Project Need Form. Bruce Easom then discussed his experiences at recent MRPC meetings. He noted that the Squannacook River Rail Trail had been removed from this year's TIP due to the lack of a funding source. Bruce noted that the North Central Rail Trail had received Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) federal funding for their rail trail. Bruce had asked the question about how towns were supposed to come up with 10% funding for rail trail projects. It was suggested by some to use state Chapter 90 road money, which would effectively divert money from repair of local roads. It was agreed this was a non-starter for our towns.

Peter Cunningham spoke of his follow-up to the meeting with DCR commissioner Rick Sullivan. Peter had had a discussion with Sean Navin, an aid to Rick Sullivan. Sean had said that the legal department at DCR was discussing the issue. Peter also said that he had discussed the Squannacook River Rail Trail with Governor Patrick at a recent meeting in Groton. Governor Patrick said he was aware of Massachusetts' poor performance in using federal funds to build rail trails, and said that was the reason he was encouraging DCR to take over the process from MassHighway. We agreed that having DCR sign the MBTA would eliminate a lot of problems and potential costs, compared to the towns signing the lease.

We next discussed federal earmarks. In a previous meeting the idea that Tsongas's earmark did not require a local match was raised. Al Futterman reported via email that this was incorrect, stating that the earmarks would

still require a 20% state or local match. Steve Meehan volunteered to follow up with Al Futterman with the question about when we might expect the next federal highway bill to be signed. Steve also said he would follow up with Al Futterman about the status of the negotiations with Pan Am/B&M about freight rights.

The next meeting was scheduled for Thursday, Sep. 17, 2009. The meeting was adjourned at 8:07 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Bill Rideout
Secretary, Squannacook River Rail Trail Funding Exploration Committee