

Squannacook River Rail Trail Funding Exploration Committee

Minutes of Public Meeting of March. 10, 2009 (Approved at April 7, 2009 meeting)

Location: Groton Town Hall, Main Street, Groton

Time: 7 pm

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

Members Absent: Ken Gerken

Attendees: Mark Cram, Cheryl Rideout (Townsend), Al Futterman (NRWA), Peter Cunningham (Groton committee member).

The meeting was brought to order at 7:07 pm. This was a joint meeting with the Groton rail trail committee, although they did not have a quorum.

The first agenda item was a review of the meeting with the congressional representatives. That meeting occurred on March 3, 2009 at 10:30 am at Groton Town Hall. In attendance was Kristin Wood representing Congressman Olver, Arthur Frost and Sarah Bradbury from MassHighway District III, Emmanuel Flaris representing State Senator Panagiotakus, Berta Erickson representing State Representative Hargraves. Steve Legge, Peter Cunningham, and Bruce Easom were the Groton representatives, and Hirk Fortin, Bill Martin, Bill Rideout, and Joan Wotkowicz were the Townsend representatives. Congresswoman Tsongas did not send a representative, but suggested someone from our committee attend a grants forum she was holding on March 16, 2009.

One issue discussed at the March 3rd meeting was the difference between using Transportation Enhancement (TE) and earmarked funds for rail trail construction in Massachusetts. Arthur Frost noted that TE funds require 80/10/10 federal/state/local match for both design and construction. However, the rules for earmarked funds are different. For earmarked funds during the design phase, the local match is 20% and the federal match is 80%. For earmarked funds during construction, no local funds are required, and the split is 80% federal and 20% state. With design costing about \$100,000/mile and construction costing about \$1,000,000/mile, a 3.7 mile rail trail using all TE funds would require \$407,000 in local matching funds. If earmarked funds were used for both design and construction, the local match required would be \$74,000. Arthur said also that a town might also end up covering about \$20,000 in additional costs during construction for a rail trail of this length.

At the March 3rd meeting Arthur Frost also discussed the need for the towns to submit a Project Need Form to MassHighway to initiate MassHighway's consideration of the project. Arthur said this form did not commit the town to the project, but it was a statement that the town felt there is a need for the

project.

After this review of the March 3rd meeting, we discussed follow-up steps. There was a discussion of using the earmarked money to begin the design process. Al Futterman volunteered to ask Kristen Wood for the exact amount remaining in that earmark. He also volunteered to ask Kristen about the possibility of a follow-up earmark, needed to cover trail construction.

Next there was discussion about the submission of a project need form, as suggested by Arthur Frost. Although only one town needed to submit the form, it was felt that selectmen from both towns should be asked for approval before either submitted the form. There was a discussion of whether this should be brought before the selectmen when the committee submitted their report, or before that. Peter Cunningham felt it should be brought before both boards in the near term. He said that this Project Need Form needed to be submitted to fully complete our task, and that a decision to not submit it would be a decision to not fully investigate the financial impacts of this rail trail. The Townsend committee voted unanimously to bring this issue before the Townsend Board of Selectmen. Peter Cunningham said he would take the lead in bring this before the Groton BOS, and Steve Meehan said he would take the lead in bring it before the Townsend BOS.

Al Futterman said he had discussed our request to Roland Theriault of Boston And Maine to drop freight rights. Roland said he was aware of the letter and planned to respond soon.

Al Futterman said that Dan Driscoll from DCR was not responding to his attempts to contact him about the possibility of a Wachusetts Greenway-style trail with a DCR lease. Peter Cunningham volunteered to try to contact Dan.

Steve Meehan reported on his attendance at a Townsend Recreational Activities Committee (TRAC) meeting on Feb. 23, 2009. Steve said their focus now was on raising funds for tennis court improvements. Steve felt that this group could possibly support our fund-raising efforts in the future.

The final action was the unanimous approval of the Townsend meeting minutes for Feb. 11, 2009.

The next meeting date was set for Tuesday, Apr. 7, 2009 at 7 pm in Townsend. The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Bill Rideout
Secretary, Squannacook River Rail Trail Funding Exploration Committee