



**CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING**

Thursday, January 19, 2017 6:00 PM
City Hall, Council Chambers, Claremont, NH

**MINUTES
Approved 2/16/2017**

I. Roll Call

Present: Eileen Skowronski, Steve Wood, Gary Dickerman, Dianne Harlow, Kim Gogan, Scott Magnuson

Absent: Nick Koloski

I. Election of Officers

Ms. Skowronski nominated Mrs. Harlow to be chairperson. Mrs. Harlow accepted the nomination with the understanding that she may be moving out of Claremont within the next 2-5 years. The Commission was unanimous in favor of the nomination.

Mr. Magnuson nominated Mr. Dickerman to be vice-chairperson. Mr. Dickerman accepted the nomination. The Commission was unanimous in favor of the nomination.

It was agreed to change the order of business to accommodate the guest speakers.

VI. Old Business

A. Update on Rail Trail waiver request and options (Jane Taylor)

Ms. Taylor offered to summarize the events that have occurred till now.

June, 2015 - Submission to NHDOT and Federal Highway of a request for an exception from the requirements of 23 USC 217H, which prohibits motorized use on bicycle and pedestrian walkways that were built with Transportation Enhancement funds. After asking for quite a bit of follow-up information and holding public hearings, NH DOT recommended that the waiver be approved, because they found in part that the particular Federal provision cited above didn't apply because the funds were used for acquisition and not construction. Federal Highway did not agree, but did not outright deny the request. They said they considered the exception request "incomplete pending further evaluation/analysis in consideration of reasonable options." Federal Highway also said that if the City and NH DOT wanted to continue the efforts related to the exception request, they recommended that the state and the City evaluate the following items:

- The environmental impacts of OHRV use because that use was not considered in the initial trail corridor acquisition
- Pedestrian and bicycle use at various locations along the trail such as segmenting the trail such as west of Chestnut Street; Chestnut Street to the bridge; the bridge itself; and then the section along Washington Street

- How motorized use would affect safe, accessible and comfortable pedestrian and bicycle use along the trail corridor
- How the City would accommodate non-motorized users
- Modifications to the trail corridor to accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists without a detour (that would have to be completed prior to allowing motorized use within the corridor)
- How the state and City would address concerns from residents who oppose allowing motorized use, especially in residential areas;
- Limit the exception request to a shorter length of the trail.

Ms. Taylor said these are the items that would have to be done for Federal Highway to consider further review of the application.

On August 25th, 2016, members of the Sullivan County ATV Club, the Conservation Commission, NH DOT Commissioner Sheehan, some other DOT representatives, members of the City Council, legislative delegations, several members of the public and City staff met at the Community Center to discuss what would be the possible next steps. Points that appeared to be at consensus among the people at the meeting were:

- The best course of action would be to submit a follow-up to the request, but limit it to that portion of the rail trail from the state gate to the bridge only;
- In order to determine whether or not the trail could or could not be modified to accommodate both ATVs and pedestrians/bikes, there needed to be an updated survey of that portion of the rail trail, as over time the boundaries have become almost obliterated. The head of the state rail bureau has provided the City with online versions of all of their maps of the trail corridor, which could serve as a starting point for any kind of survey work that would be done. While everyone thought the survey was a good idea, the question remained as to who would pay for it. LUCT funds was mentioned as a possibility. At this time, the cost of the survey is unknown. A portion of the trail has been recently surveyed for the TAP (Safe Routes to School) grant – that person may be willing to do the survey as part of that project. An RFP would be required. There is no money in the City budget for this work. Grants or private donations are other possible options.

Ms. Taylor said she strongly advocated for the survey because it is the only way to determine whether or not there is room to make alterations to the trail within its corridor. The Rail Trail Master Plan calls for survey work to be done. She recommended starting up the Master Plan process once again even though this portion of the trail may have to be footnoted.

Mrs. Harlow said that the ATV club estimates that the survey will cost \$5,000 (monumentation may or may not be included) and has applied for four different grants to pay for it. They are looking for a response by June or July.

Ms. Taylor recommended that the Commission work with the Planning & Development Director on an RFP for the survey so the actual costs can be determined. She suggested that the Commission pay for the cost of advertising. She suggested not waiting until June or July to move forward.

Ms. Taylor also recommended working with the Regional Planning Commission to discuss what are the methodologies that can be used to determine environmental concerns. While the impacts may be minimal, the Commission must still demonstrate that they have been addressed.

Mrs. Harlow said she had already spoken with Ms. Merrill about an RFP, though she was uncertain where the RFP now stands.

James Feleen said a full instrument survey will reveal some significant encroachments and wondered if “we” would “end up in court for a number of years fighting with abutters?” He said it (the survey) would open up a “potential legal can of worms that maybe doesn’t need to be opened in terms of the trail pathway – we don’t need a survey to determine where that is.” He said he doesn’t know why the City would need to know where the outer boundaries of the corridor are.

B. Review of Pleasant to Chestnut TAP project on the Rail Trail (Kurt Beek)

Mr. Beek shared a map showing the extent of the project. The trail work will extend from Pleasant Street to Chestnut Street. Sidewalk work will start on Pleasant, extend down East Street to Baker Street, then cross with the remainder to Broad Street.

Mr. Beek said that this plan was presented at the last preferred alternatives meeting, which was one of two meetings held so far. The first meeting was to gather public input. The engineers (CMA) created a draft design report following the first public meeting (requirement of the grant program and NH DOT). It looks at conceptual alignment for sidewalk on East Street and the improvements to the trail. They hired a licensed surveyor as a sub-consultant, who does a full-blown ground survey of the project limits (this has been completed). Environmental considerations are made (wetlands) and the historic nature of the rail trail. Any properties that abut sidewalk work on East Street are also reviewed.

All of this information is put into a design report, which was submitted to NH DOT last November as a draft. Some comments have been received back which are currently being addressed. The next step is to reply to the comments. Then the DOT gives the City approval to proceed with preliminary design. This should happen in late February, early March. The engineers will then begin putting together a detailed plan set. Temporary construction easements will be sought at this time, primarily for the sidewalk work. It is hoped to prepare final designs by mid-summer, early fall. Bid documents for construction should be ready by this time next year, with construction starting in the summer of 2018.

Surface work on the trail will include establishing a profile of the existing trail, minor grading, a 1 ½ or 2-inch overlay of a hard pack material. The engineers are trying to get a spec from some other groups around the state who have had improvements on other trails with success with a certain gradation of gravels and stone dust. They will try to establish some ditching, take out some low spots to prevent any ponding, replace one or two small culverts that go under the trail; install signage and striping at the road crossings; (actuated crossing signs – strobe light-type signs activated by anyone on the trail), perhaps some tree-thinning to open up the canopy in wet areas.

There will also be improvements to the parking area on Pleasant Street, including grading so it drains properly, putting down a hard pack surface or an asphalt pavement, install a light or two and an informational kiosk.

Mr. Wood asked if there were plans to remove any hazard trees within the project area. Mr. Beek agreed that that was a good idea and said he would look into it.

The Commission took a five-minute recess.

C. Rail Trail Master Plan – where to go from here; priorities (J. Edwards)

Mr. Edwards said the Regional Planning Commission is happy to provide whatever help is needed to resume the rail trail planning efforts.

He said one approach to take is to think about the user base for each of three segments of the trail (Pleasant Street to the bridge; from the bridge to the gate; beyond the gate). He said the TAP grant area is more of a downtown neighborhood type area where people would be riding bikes and walking, slow-moving and unlikely to welcome noise. From there to the bridge could be a transitional area; then along Washington Street and beyond, could be a multi-purpose area. If it's wide enough, perhaps the trail could be divided.

Mrs. Harlow said they are trying to get the section from the bridge to Home Depot open for motorized vehicles and why they are trying to get it surveyed – to see how wide the trail is there and if it will be possible to add a parallel trail for motorized vehicles.

Mr. Edwards is completing a grant application to DOT for the next two fiscal years starting in July. There is a part that is just about bike and pedestrian access and accessibility – in a new budget, RPC might be able to get some funds to help (if DOT approves it and RPC gets the grant amount they will be requesting.) They are currently using money from an existing equivalent grant to help the Planning Department in the update of the Transportation chapter of the Master Plan. He said he was able to find some DOT money to pay for \$5,000 of work on the Transportation chapter update. He said there might be something in there.

Mr. Edwards said that RPC can help if the Commission wants to resume public discussions on the rail trail and in making some decisions once the Commission has some facts on where the trail is and what the resolution of the motorized vehicle issue is.

Mr. Edwards offered to assist with the air quality study.

If there are any grade changes in the trail, any drainage issues would have to be addressed and mitigated.

There was some discussion on types of surface materials for the trail. Mr. Edwards said that hard pack satisfies the widest variety of users, although it is possible to

consider different surfaces on different segments of the trail or to provide parallel lanes with differing surfaces.

Everyone thanked Mr. Edwards for visiting with the Commission and sharing much helpful information.

II. Handbook Check-up

Handbooks were checked for any missing or outdated information.

III. Review of Minutes of preceding meeting(s)

A. December 15, 2016

Motion: To accept the minutes of the December 15th, 2016 Conservation Commission meeting.

Made by: Mr. Dickerman

Second: Mr. Magnuson

Vote: Unanimous in favor

IV. Finance Report

A. December 2016

The Commission reviewed the financial statement for December 2016. No action was taken.

V. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

VI. Old Business (Discussed above)

A. Update on Rail Trail waiver request and options (Jane Taylor)

B. Review of Pleasant to Chestnut TAP project on the Rail Trail (Kurt Beek)

C. Rail Trail Master Plan – where to go from here; priorities (J. Edwards)

VII. New business

A. Begin prioritization of Master Plan goals and objectives

Commissioners agreed to study the list of goals and objectives (from the newly re-written Natural Resources chapter of the Master Plan) and begin prioritizing them.

Ms. Gogan suggested prioritizing based on ease of completion. Of the bigger items, prioritizing based on ease and feasibility.

It was suggested that priorities be set based on urgency in addition to ease and feasibility.

Ms. Gogan asked that there be a similar list created for the Conservation Plan goals and objectives.

A strategic action plan representing the convergence of the Master Plan and the Conservation Plan that extends for the next three to five years would be the most helpful.

It was also suggested that an “Ongoing” column be added to the list.

VIII. Communications

Complete Forestry Notification - received for a project on Clay Hill Road.

Wetlands Notification – by ATV Club for a culvert on Cathole Road; DES is looking for additional information; Mrs. Harlow is working with DPW to get it done with hopes of replacing the culvert in the spring.

IX. Other Business

Haynes Conservation Easement

Mrs. Harlow distributed to the Commission information regarding the purchase of a 152.5-acre conservation easement by the Upper Valley Land Trust on the John and Beth Haynes property on Tengren Avenue.

Pollinator Gardens

Mrs. Harlow has been contacted by the Hanover Biodiversity Group, a group that works with schools and cities to create pollinator gardens. She was asked if the Conservation Commission would like to partner with them. It seemed like a good way to move the pollinator garden idea forward. There are several classes about pollinator gardens coming up in March. The classes will be held at the Montshire Museum. Mrs. Harlow expressed a desire to go and offered to car pool with others who might like to join her. She also suggested inviting the committee to come and speak to the Commission to get more information.

Mrs. Skowronski said that some of our common weeds are some of the best pollinators (asters, goldenrod). She has a list of the best pollinator plants.

Barry Camp

No applications were received. It was agreed to return to sending letters home with the students next year in addition to the eblast. Ms. Gogan said she would like to talk to some of the staff at the schools to see if they know of any students who would benefit from the camp.

II. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn the meeting

Made by: Mr. Dickerman **Second:** Mr. Magnuson

Vote: Unanimous in favor

Respectfully submitted,

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