



Town of Topsfield

TOPSFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

Topsfield Rail Trail Committee Meeting Minutes March 9, 2015 – 8:30 PM

Members Present: Joe Geller (chair), Dave Read, Roy Beassler, Gregg Demers and Bill Rossiter

Guests: Dick Gandt (Selectman), Pete Hayes, Jack Long, Kyle McLaughlin, Dianne McLaughlin, Paul Roach and Roger Roach

- 1. Minutes approval:** The minutes of the June 9, 2014 meeting were approved unanimously.
- 2. Masco Inter Program:** Kyle McLaughlin and his mom discussed his desire to help the Rail Trail Committee as part of his community service requirement as a Masco high intern project. The committee discussed projects that Kyle could help with and who could supervise him at various times of day. Since Kyle has access to a pick-up truck, some of the work could focus on Phase 4. Roy and Bill offered to take the lead on this.
- 3. Eagle Scout Project:** Paul Roach made a proposal to the Committee to install distance markers along the trail as part of his Eagle Scout requirement. These may help for safety if 911 calls are made to Topsfield Fire and Rescue for any emergencies along the trail. The group thought these would also be mostly used by runners for distances along the trail. There was unanimous support for wanting to help Paul complete his Eagle Scout project followed by some discussion concerning the possibility of too much signage along the trail: 'sign pollution'. Danvers has distance markers every tenth of a mile but that was deemed excessive by the group on such a rural trail as ours. The Danvers Rail Trail Committee also 'sells' sponsorships for its mileage markers to raise funds for the trail. The group also thought Topsfield doesn't have the density of businesses to be able to support a similar sustainable sponsor-a-marker program. Also, if the posts for the markers

installed too close to the trail, they could make mowing the trail more difficult. The discussion settled on putting the distance markers on the telephone poles so they are visible to trail users and any emergency responders but they'd be out of the way and only noticeable for trail users looking for them. Because Eagle Scout projects need to be at least 100 hours, Bill suggested Paul also develop signs at the cross streets along the trail. They could be fastened below the STOP signs so no additional poles would be needed. The group also thought the mileages should be continued from the Danvers line where they currently end (through Wenham) into Topsfield so there is less confusion on where someone is on the multi-town trail. Next steps on this project are as follows: Joe will contact National Grid for permission to install distance markers on their poles, Dave will contact Wenham officials for permission to do this through their section of trail, Roy will provide the previous purchased flexible plastic marker posts, Dave will put Paul in touch with two sign manufacturers and, once the snow melts, Paul will check out the distance markers in Danvers to see where they stop and their design format so ours looks similar. Paul will be invited to the next trail committee meeting once we have more information.

4. **Witch Hill sign proposal:** Jack Long of the Topsfield Historical Society presented a proposal to put a sign up on the trail that commemorates the historical significance of Witch Hill in Topsfield. The group discussed this but Pete thought, since the trail is a couple of miles from Witch Hill, the historical sign may be better placed at the top of the Wheatlands sledding hill near Salem St. where Witch Hill can be seen from. Jack also thought this was a better idea.
5. **IRB repair work:** The emergency work on the abutments that was completed last year has stabilized the bridge but it still needs more permanent repairs. We are waiting on two next steps for this: drawings from our engineer and the filing of the Notice of Intent (NOI) with the Conservation Commission. There was also some discussion that if this work wasn't completed by the fall, should we request repurposing our last DCR grant toward other needed work on the trail such as erosion control. This is a possibility as our most recent DCR grant proposal was not funded in the last state cycle. The committee will discuss this more at the next meeting.

- 6. Route 97 parking area:** Once the snow melts Joe would like us to review other possibilities for a parking area at Route 97 near the trail access and canoe landing.
- 7. Trail maintenance:** Bill reviewed the on-going mowing and brush removal on each section of trail that is needed several times a year. There is basically three people doing and committed to regular trail maintenance: Bill, Roy and Pete. We need to add more volunteers to help keep the trail looking good and so it doesn't get overgrown. Pete indicated he thought the mowing was getting a bit easier but all of them agreed that the most difficult part was cutting back the brush and getting the hanging branches away from the path of the mower. The group agreed that we need a deeper bench for trail maintenance.
- 8. Volunteer list:** Roy reviewed the email distribution list he uses to send out work party notifications. He said that occasionally people say they want to volunteer for trail work but when we send out an ask for help, it's the same few who show up every time. We agreed that rather than a blast email volunteer request, we'd each take ownership for folks on the list and send them a more personal ask. We reviewed Roy's list and removed folks who we know have moved out of town or who may have a different email than on our list. As a next step on this, Roy will sent out the volunteer list with a TRTC contact designee next to each name. Dave also thought that one way to attract more people to help with trail work might be to have more regular meetings, advertize them in the newspaper and stick to the schedule even if it means shorter meetings. He recommended five scheduled meetings per year with other ad-hoc meetings as needed. These could be in January, March, May, September and November. He noted that Danvers has 11 regular scheduled meetings and they seem to draw a crowd each month.
- 9. Strawberry Festival booth:** We reviewed the successful event last June and agreed we should staff another booth this year. Joe will contact the Historical Society to reserve a space and at the next meeting we'll work out the a set-up and coverage schedule for the day.
- 10. Phase IV update:** The wetlands delineation is now done. Joe was able to borrow a GPS unit from the town Water Dept. He indicated that he estimated in about 45 days we

should have a preliminary design completed for the committee to review before it goes to the Selectmen and ultimately National Grid for approval.

11. National Grid update: Steve Towle of National Grid indicated we can submit the design for Phase IV before the Notice of Intent (NOI) is submitted to the Conservations Commission. The next step is to measure the distance from the ground (trail surface) to the power lines and to do that we need a specific device. Joe and Gregg indicated that the Friends of the Topsfield Trails now have enough funds to purchase the required equipment.

12. Bike repair stand: The stand, donated by the North Shore Cyclists, has arrived. These are becoming very popular along well-used trails. It cost \$1,000 and has all the basic bike tools and a bike pump which are secured with cables. We can install it in the spring after the thaw.

13. Kiosk update: Last year, in conjunctions with the towns of Danvers and Wenham we were awarded a matching grant by the Essex National Heritage Commission to build four informational kiosks with maps, mileages and some local history to be placed at various locations along the trail. Dave built four of these over the winter and then a 5th kiosk that the town of Peabody wanted for the Lowell St. trail head. The next step is getting and cutting the green metal roof for these and Roy and Bill have offered to help. Then he will install these in the ground at the 5 locations along the trail. The one in Topsfield will be at Washington St. trail intersection and the kiosk will be smaller than the one at Route 1. Instead of taking 5 separate days to install these kiosks, Dave is organizing a large volunteer day as part of the Comcast Cares Day to be able to get them installed all in one day – the date Comcast would like to to this is Saturday, April 25th. He is looking for 4 to 5 crew chiefs that he can show how to put them together. As a next step for Topsfield, Joe will seek Conservation Commission approval to dig the two small holes needed for the posts.

14. Winter Trail usage: The committee discussed ways to ensure year round trail use so it can be used more in the winter. All agreed that with this year's exceptional snowfall, there was little that could be done in February for trail access but perhaps there are some things we could do in future winters. These include asking the Highway Dept to try to not

block the trail when plowing the roads. The section of trail between Washington St. and the tennis courts could be plowed (like some of the sidewalks) as that is heavily used by the kids as a safer route to school than along the side of the road.

15. Ten year celebrations for TRTC: Dave noted that we are approaching the formal formation of the Topsfield Rail Trail Committee by the Selectmen. We officially launched our work in May of 2005 with our first meeting in June of that year. We now have a beautiful trail to show for our efforts! We may plan some acknowledgment or celebration of the event later this spring or summer.

Meeting adjourned at 10:50 PM

Respectfully submitted, Dave Read