Friends of Dryden Rail Trails

Inaugural Meeting at DPW (Old Dryden Town Hall March 16, 2016

Dryden Town Board member Greg Sloan opened the meeting, welcomed attendees (listed below), and turned the meeting over to Bob Beck, Chair of the Town Conservation Board, who organized the meeting. Greg and Alice Green served as secretary/notetakers.

History/Background: Bob thanked attendees and presented a powerpoint (actually Adobe Lightroom) with brief history of railroad lines and depots in the Town of Dryden, including a map of rail tracks through Freeville, Dryden and East Ithaca. He said these local railroads were built quickly in the 1860s-1870s, with large numbers of workers. Freeville is the junction of two old lines; one connects Elmira to Ithaca to Cortland and on to Utica, the other runs from Sayre, Pa. through the village of Dryden north to Auburn. Rail depots brought people and commerce into the towns and villages

Last spring, the Town of Dryden contracted with a Cornell group, Design Connect, to develop a concept plan for the trail from Mount Pleasant Rd. in Varna to the Village of Freeville. The 55-page document is available at the Town of Dryden Website. (http://dryden.ny.us/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Varna-Freevile-rail-trail-Design-Connect-_final-report-5_14_2015-small.pdf)

Trail Route: The currently planned trail route runs from Game Farm Rd. and the East Ithaca Recreation Way to Varna, Etna, Freeville, and then SE to Dryden, to connect up with the Jim Schug Trail (which runs 4 miles, from Route 13 toward Harford.)

Discussion of Issues in Building the Trail

- **Bridges and road crossing issues**, including the "FH Fox" Bridge over Route 366 in Varna, crossing Route 13 near Monkey Run, old trestles and washouts.
- **Funding**
  Dan Lamb noted that costs could run between $50,000 and $200,000/mile
  So a very rough cost estimate might be $1 million for 10 miles @ $100k/mile.
  Greg looked up lengths after the fact:
  1.2 miles - Game Farm Rd. to Mt. Pleasant Rd.
  6.3 miles - Mt. Pleasant Rd. to Freeville
  3.3 miles - Freeville to Dryden
  10.8 miles Total
  Bob said many sources of funding are available, including federal, state and local funds. NYS Parks–Finger Lakes Region has requested a meeting about the Dryden trails. The trail can also get "sweat equity" contributions from volunteer trail builders. Cornell could be approached. Also, Cornell students, staff and alumni are likely interested in memorializing Prof. FH Fox with donations to the trail. The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy has provided advice to many similar projects. (See www.railstotrails.org)

Questions:

- Why did Design Connect begin at Mt. Pleasant Rd. rather than Game Farm Rd? Answer: Part of that section will be easy to complete (to Stevenson Rd.) the rest awaits DEC permission. Charlie Smith and Mike Richmond pointed out that the traditional uses of Game Farm area may be in flux. Town will work patiently with DEC.
- When can we begin approaching individual property owners along the trail to discuss easements? Dan Lamb said when Railroad abandoned the tracks, the town gave the adjacent property owners the easements. (at 66 feet width). Now the hope is they will be willing to give the easements back to benefit this new community resource.
  Bob said all property adjacent owners were contacted by Design Connect and invited to the April 2015 design presentation, where their input was invited and recorded.
- Questions/comments re: varying costs of different sections,

- Discussion re: multi-modal use of trails and history of use of bike trails here and elsewhere

Tasks for the Friends of Dryden Trails

As outlined by Greg Sloan, subgroups can be organized to work on:

- Fundraising
- Public Outreach – general education and communication
- Working on Easements with landowners
- Organizing Volunteers
- Trail Plan Problem Solving in specific areas, such as Route 13 crossing

Attendee comments, questions and suggestions:

Bruno Schickel –we need to telegraph our intention to build the entire trail,
Charlie Smith - we should aim for the low-hanging fruit first
Stephanie Mulinos - another approach - organize into groups for each segment
Greg agreed that this was certainly a valid alternative
Bruno Schickel - we need public support and landowner support
even a half-mile segment connecting two roads would build support
even if not graveled, it would show what the trail can be
and resistance would drop; “”sweat equity” - community involvement will build support
(e.g. families and kids clearing brush as volunteers)
Mike Richmond - still wants us to keep the full-trail vision
Charlie Smith - almost all of the route is walkable (but see John Kiefer's question near the end)
"FH Fox Memorial Trail" from Game Farm to Freeville could build interest
in private funding
General agreement - we need an easement document: the Town has prepared an easement template
Dan Karig - has a cautionary tale from the S. Hill Rec. Way. We will have resistance at first, we can convince reluctant landowners, but we can reduce the problem by thinking ahead. On S. Hill, mistake was to not get out early and talk to people fast enough. There are already many rumors in Dryden about what might or might not happen. We can’t have too much communication with people
Greg Sloan - communication with the public is our first task
Organizational note - the official committee will be a conduit between the Friends and the Town Board
Bruno Schickel - we need to think of the trail as more than recreational. It is also an alternative transportation route - greener than cars
Reps from Finger Lakes Cycling Club- trail has potential to increase tourism
Armin Heurich - tourism is also important; the Freeville-Dryden route is a key stretch
Charlie Smith - the trail provides access to nature, uses for bird watching, plant identification, photography and as a wildlife corridor are also important
Stephanie Mulinos - the Town Board needs to move efficiently
we need talking points for the Friends to use, so we stay on the same page
David Bravo-Cullen - the uses mentioned could compete with each other
(but the Friends generally dissented from this viewpoint)
Rick Kugler - we need to keep this energy - need to share info with each other
perhaps a forum. An example - some trails use alternative materials alongside trails
to facilitate use by horses and pull-offs, and so people who stop don't block others
Bruno Schickel - we need to prioritize speaking to landowners; they need to know what we're doing
Dan Karig - we need coverage in the media for the general public
Steve Shaum - we need to think about business owners along the trail, too
Eileen Maxwell - for effective outreach, need to know what to say to landowners.
they will be concerned about what will happen to their property
how wide will the trail be? how narrow? will trees be cut?
Bob Beck - the original rail easement was 66 feet wide, but the actual trail can be much narrower
Todd Bitner - we can negotiate for a part of it
Bob Beck - we can work out different issues with different landowners
A key issue to present to landowners is that when they sign a trail easement, they will be relieved

from liability. There are many misconceptions and fears out there. It's not true that trails increase vandalism, crime, or litter.
Charlie Smith - the width and height of the Jim Schug trail was driven by the need for emergency access
Judy Pierpont - what if landowners insist on no bike access? General response - bike access is a main point of the easement
Bruno Schickel - what about tax consequences of easements? (Discussion followed re: appraisal of value of the charitable donation of trail land vs. property assessment)
John Keifer: what parts of the trail are legal to walk? Answer: See page 14 of the Design Connect doc (N/A here means private land; may not be open to public: respect private ownership)

Next Steps:

1) Resolution from the Town Board creating the Trails Steering Committee (Dan Lamb has this mostly drafted, is asking input from friends, with goal of bringing it to the April Town Board meeting.)
2) Create a one-page project summary document that will guide discussions with all stakeholders
3) Outreach to additional stakeholders who can help with the project, including the Chamber of Commerce, perhaps representatives from the William George Agency. (Need a stakeholder analysis).
4) Set up a list serve, or group e-mail to continue sharing expertise and enthusiasm

NEXT MEETING: Wednesday, April 13, at 7 pm; Town DPW, 61 E. Main St., Dryden (same location)

Rail-Trail Meeting Attendees 3-16-16

Initial Steering Committee Members
Greg Sloan <sloan@isc.astro.cornell.edu>
Dan Lamb <dlamb@dryden.ny.us>
Bob Beck <rmb24@cornell.edu>
Todd Bittner <todd.bittner@cornell.edu>
David Bravo-Cullen <dsbravoiii@aol.com>
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John Kiefer <jak14@cornell.edu>
Rick Kugler <riki.dian@gmail.com>
David LoParco <dpl1@cornell.edu>
Judy Pierpont <jp28@cornell.edu>
Steve Powell <sp35@cornell.edu>
Milo Richmond <mrichmond2@twcny.rr.com>
Bruno Schickel <info@schickelconstruction.com>
Kathy Servoss <kdservoss@gmail.com>
Chris Tessaglia-Hymes <cth4@cornell.edu> (absent due to illness)
Diana Radford <dbirdie2@aol.com>
Diann Zeigler <riki.dian@gmail.com>
Others Present
Ray Burger <rburger@dryden.ny.us>
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