Dryden Rail Trail Friends and Task Force
Minutes of the Sept. 21, 2016 Meeting
Village of Dryden Hall

Attendance: Bob Beck, Thomas Cleland, John Kiefer, Todd Bitner, David Fogel, Diane Tessaglia-Hymes, Chris Tessaglia-Hymes, Jim Miner, Armin Heurich, Bruno Schickel, Judy Pierpont, Alice Green, David Bravo Cullen, Milo Richmond, Mike Lane, Dan Lamb

Meeting was convened at 7:05 pm

Review of Agenda

Announcement: The minutes of the Dryden Rail Trail Friends and Task Force are now archived on the town website.

Update on meetings and easements with rail bed landowners

Bruno reported that easement meetings have been a fantastic success. A key reason is that the water/sewer easement already exists, and property owners already see this as area they can't develop. In areas where larger development is planned near the trail, developers see it as a positive.

Efforts to obtain easements have proceeded at both ends of the proposed trail, from the Village of Dryden end as well as from Game Farm Rd.

After a meeting with William George Agency maintenance director Pat Foote, Bruno arranged a meeting with officials of the agency. As reported last month, the executive director agreed to recommend the proposed trail to the Board of Directors. Subsequently, the board met, and the proposal is under review by the agency's legal and insurance representatives. Other nearby property owners are also favorable

Bob listed landowners and businesses in the section between Route 13 and the Village of Freeville that have given a favorable response, including the former Wilcox Press, Saunders Concrete (they have a concern regarding storm water management), NYSE&G, Leonardo's, Adkins and Glenn Swan. In some cases, there will be a reciprocal agreement allowing current owners to access their property along the trail.

Bruno described a conversation with one property owner who started out in opposition to the project, who became more positive, but not yet ready to say yes. Some reluctant landowners may change their minds when they see the momentum and inevitability of the trail. When the majority of the stakeholders approve the trail, they won't want to be bad neighbors.

Diane mentioned a specific study that showed that concerns about trails bringing in undesirables were unfounded. In fact, there were fewer incidents of crime and vandalism where trails were made officially public. Chris and Diane live near the Etna section of the trail, and are land stewards for the Etna Preserve.

Bob reported that about 30 landowners have received individually tailored easement documents; three are signed and returned.

Mike Lane suggested seeking a story about the trail proposal in the Ithaca Journal, once a critical mass of property owners have returned the signed easements.

Todd reported that he and Cornell colleagues have submitted draft modifications to an easement agreement for trail sections owned by the CU Agriculture and Cornell Plantations along Monkey Run. These will be reviewed by the town attorney and supervisor. It is hoped that a single easement, covering all Cornell owned property along the rail trail corridor, will be signed and submitted to the Town in time for approval at the October Town Board meeting.

There is no progress yet in negotiations with the DEC for easement across the Game Farm area. A portion of the rail corridor from Stevenson Rd. is currently being used to access Cornell's composting center.

Letters of Support for Grant Proposal to DOT

Judy updated letters from a 1999 effort by Jim Schug to secure trail funding, and submitted requests for support from a list of community leaders, stakeholders and trail promoters. Emphasis for the Department of Transportation grant is on provision of alternative transportation networks for employers and businesses. Letters are being sought from the Villages of Dryden and Freeville, Town of Dryden Planning Board, the County Board of Representatives, and many others.

Report on 9/6 ITCTC meeting with DOT representatives, and 9/15 DOT/TAP grant workshop in Syracuse – Bob, Bruno and John Kiefer

The federal grant (administered by NYS DOT) would provide 80% of the costs of trail creation, with the town assuming 20% (which can include in kind services). DOT representatives told Dryden reps that all easements may not need to be fully in place for grant approval. They may provide help and funding to obtain easements. After considering the possibility of seeking the funding to cover critical sections along the entire trail from Game Farm Road to the Village of Dryden, it was decided to focus on the Phase One section from Game Farm Rd. to Route 13.

TAP Grant Issues: Proposed Scope, Costs and Implementation Schedule

John Kiefer put together the scope, schedule and budget for the project for a pre-application meeting to get feedback from DOT representatives. So far, they have responded very favorably to the proposal.

The scope of the project includes creating an ADA accessible, solid stone dust surface for the Phase One trail. This will be easily accomplished in some areas, but not others, for example the section along the Game Farm. There was discussion of whether to follow the railroad corridor, which includes two trestles and is highly overgrown, or move the trail to the edge of the field. So far, DEC has said it would allow hikers (but not bicycles) to go along the edge. First choice is to go through the wooded area and along Cascadilla Creek, to enhance the experience of users.

The grant proposal also seeks improvements to the FH Fox Bridge across Route 366, including chain link fence for safety and to prevent objects being thrown off it onto the roadway. Ownership of the bridge is being researched by the DOT.

Alternatives for crossing Route 13 can also be researched and presented as part of the scope of work covered by the grant. One option, a user activated signal, might cost in the neighborhood of $100,000 to $150,000. Another option is to continue the trail to the Route 13/366 intersection where there is an existing light. Also to be studied are a bridge over the highway and going under the highway bridge along Fall Creek. Todd said it would not be possible to route the trail through woods and across fragile wetlands in the Monkey Run area.

Preliminary estimates of Phase One project cost are in the neighborhood of $700,000, which would be covered 80% by the grant and 20% by the town. David asked if the town decided not to try to meet the DOT surface requirements, could it build an acceptable trail for the 20%? John K reminded that part of the town share could be in kind services. On a quick analysis, he said, the elements required for even a basic trail would cost twice the town share of the grant total.

The scope of the grant proposal also includes parking areas at Game Farm and Mount Pleasant Rds.

A tentative schedule for trail creation seeks to secure funding, and completing planning and engineering during 2017, with construction in 2018. The DOT is likely to make a decision on the grant by the end of 2016.

New County Wide Interactive Trail Website

The new "Ithaca Trails" website is set to be on line at www.IthacaTrails.org in October. Todd has been a key player in developing this one spot access to mapping for all 240 miles of Tompkins County area trails. The site is formatted for easy use on smart phones.

Black Diamond Trail – Finger Lakes Cycling Club Celebration

Armin announced that after 40 years in the making, the Black Diamond Trail will be celebrated from 12:30-4:30 pm Sunday Oct. 2 at Cass Park. The trail spans 8.3 miles, is 18 feet in its widest parts, required installation of more than 20 culverts and cost over $3 million.

Montgomery Park Playground Build

Bruno said volunteers are needed for the playground build, between 8 am and 7-8 pm Oct.5 -10. Playground organizers raised more than $112,000 in three months. Volunteers can sign up at www.DrydenMontgomeryPark.org

Next Meeting: Wednesday Oct 12 (one week early to finalize grant decisions) in the Town DPW Meeting Room

Meeting adjourned at 9:17 pm Submitted by: Alice Walsh Green