

**Dryden Rail Trail Friends and Task Force  
Minutes of the Feb. 15, 2017 Meeting  
Dryden Town DPW**

**Attendance:** Bob Beck, Bruno Schickel, Mike Richmond, David Fogel, Gene German, Jim Miner, Alice Green, David Bravo-Cullen, John Kiefer, Steve Foote, Judy Pierpont, Dan Lamb, Todd Bittner, Nancy Munkenbeck

**Meeting convened** at 7:03 pm

**Announcements:** Task Force agendas and minutes are now posted on the Town website

**Response from DOT grant application**

Dan Lamb reported that notifications of NYS Department of Transportation (DOT) grant recipients - originally expected by January - are now not expected maybe “until the spring,” according to Fernando D’Aragon of the Ithaca-Tompkins Transportation Council. Todd Bittner said that this does provide an opportunity to complete the filing of additional trail easements from property owners before the grant would go into effect.

**Trail easements recorded by County Clerk**

The eight easements, covering 12 parcels, approved at the December Town Board meeting, were recorded with the County Clerk on January 30. Bob provided copies to and thanked all the property owners.

**Submission of Doppfelt Grant application**

New Friends volunteer Mark Wilson helped complete a grant application to the Doppfelt Family Foundation (Rails to Trails Conservancy) that could yield \$20,000 to \$45,000 for the trail. If approved, these funds could also be applied to the local match for the DOT grant.

**Permits required for the trail to cross the “FH Fox” bridge across Route 366 in Varna**

Two permits from the State DOT are required: one for use and occupancy, and a second highway work permit. Dryden Town Planner Ray Burger expects no filing fees will be required. The bridge passed a safety inspection a couple of years ago. It’s hoped that former students of Professor Fox may help fund improvements to the bridge, such as painting and signage, as a memorial. Bob will pursue the DOT permits.

**Continuing DEC Game Farm Contacts**

Dan followed up on his earlier effort to make contact with Ken Lynch, Deputy Commissioner of the NYS Department of Conservation (DEC) (former director of our DEC Region 7) regarding new efforts to secure the DEC/Game Farm trail easement. The commissioner’s secretary said he has discussed the issue. Dan hopes to have an update by the next Task Force meeting.

There is hope that the new DEC director of Fish and Wildlife, Tony Wilkinson, who is formerly a regional director of the Nature Conservancy, may be receptive to the trail easement proposal. Bob has asked Jim Howe, Director the CWNV Nature Conservancy, who collaborated with him in creating the von Engeln Preserve at Malloryville, to advocate with Wilkinson regarding the easement for the trail to pass through the Game Farm.

Todd said a meeting is planned for Feb. 17 to discuss a planned replacement of the Game Farm Road bridge over Cascadilla Creek at the head of the proposed Dryden Rail Trail. The current width of the bridge is a safety issue. Cornell and Town of Dryden planners are recommending

that the trail be routed under the bridge, and then reconnect with the currently abandoned rail bed through the Game Farm property.

### **More progress on landowner easements – Bruno, Bob**

There are 19 to 20 more easements “in the works,” at various stages of paperwork approval, including the parcel owned by the William George Agency. One realtor in the Varna area just agreed to sign an easement. With Bruno’s help, another property owner, adjacent to the George Agency, is reviewing a map of the proposed easement to get up and over George Rd. On that property, a proposed large solar farm is slated to include solar panels, enclosed by fencing, installed from the creek right up to the rail trail. Rachel Graham of Varna, the first easement signer, is a notary, and has offered to accompany Bob to help landowners complete that process.

However, a couple of landowners, who initially said they were willing to sign easements, have now indicated that they want to wait until they sell their land. It was noted that proximity to a recreational trail tends to raise the value of a property, and that when the inevitability of the trail becomes clear, these landowners may be willing. In some cases, the reluctant landowner only holds half of the railroad right of way, so the other half owned by a willing landowner could be used. In at least one case, a reluctant landowner holds the full right of way. However, the Town of Dryden maintains utility easements for the entire railroad bed, so those sections cannot be otherwise developed.

Bob outlined progress with property owners in the trail section from Pinckney Rd. to Route 366 at Etna. Three are agreeable to the trail, and two live out of state, making negotiations more complicated. Efforts are still underway to make contact with one other business in that area.

### **Promoting volunteer recruitment and community involvement**

Bob, Bruno and Alice met to discuss starting the volunteer recruitment campaign, including a note to the list serve outlining volunteer opportunities. A handful of people have responded, but more are likely when specific tasks and dates are posted. Bruno recommended that a Facebook presence for the Trail project is a first priority. He volunteered to arrange to have this set up. More long term, a formal Dryden Rail Trails website will be needed.

Bruno recommends building community participation, momentum, and enthusiasm this year by scheduling workdays on the trail and construction of some components by work parties off site. Amenities like benches, kiosks, bike racks and railings could be built and then transported and installed along the trail. For the already completed Schug trail, Dryden Youth Conservation Corps teens built the benches and installed them in concrete at mile intervals, in coordination with the town highway department and the Ithaca Youth Bureau.

Another way of building community involvement is asking for residents’ input on the theme and design of amenities for the trail. A railroad theme - a possibility for the Village of Freeville’s planned “station” pocket park on Railroad St. – is one option. Rather than having the Task Force decide, Todd suggested harnessing the creativity of the community in a “charette” style brainstorming session. The first step would be finding an experienced facilitator to coordinate the process.

Alice’s note to the list serve included a special request for a volunteer facilitator with planning and design experience, but there were no initial responses. Some possible individuals were suggested to contact, and Alice will follow up. Timing for the community charette was discussed, possibly in May or early June.

Mike listed many possible themes that can be incorporated, including natural history, water features, history of land use, historical rail pictures, birds and wildlife. Nancy suggested that bike racks should be placed near commercial spots along the trail, and opportunities like biking to cross country skiing could be featured.

### **Economic Benefit of Trails**

Todd presented new data on the economics of trails. The Finger Lakes Trail Conference conducted an economic assessment of the value that trails provide to the local economy - a **staggering \$232,000 per mile per year of economic benefit for unpaved recreation trails**. The nationwide study was funded by the Outdoor Industry Association, and the Finger Lakes Trail Conference and Cornell statisticians then reanalyzed the data and adjusted it just for New York State.

This is important information for conversations with business leaders, elected officials, landowners, potential donors, or even the general public about the Dryden Rail Trail and talking up the multiple values and benefits it will have for the community. Keep this figure in mind. **For the planned 10.8 mile trail extension, the anticipated economic impact to the community would be \$2.5 million per year.**

### **Meet with Finger Lakes State Parks staff (explore NYS OPRHP support)**

The State office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation is expected to issue a request for proposal (RFP) this spring. Bob, John K., and Bruno will meet Fred Bonn and Kathleen McIsaac of the Finger Lakes State Parks Friday on Feb. 17, to discuss feasibility for a Dryden Rail Trail grant.

John K. pointed out that grant monies often come with strings attached. For example, the DOT grant stipulates a 20% local match, and requires a packed stone surface for accessibility. The Task Force did an analysis of whether the Town could build a simpler trail for the cost of the local match. The answer was: No. However, the NYS Parks grant will also require accessibility, and needs a 50% match. But there may be greater latitude about what kind of services can be applied to the local match, like all the volunteer hours that Task Force will put into the project.

### **Plan more grant applications (Park Foundation?)**

Bob plans to make contact with Jon Jenson, executive director of the Park Foundation "Sustainable Ithaca" division, regarding grants available in the Smart Growth /Alternative Transportation category. The next 2017 application deadlines are March 31, July 7 and September 29.

### **Rollout of the Ithaca Trails Website**

The comprehensive new IthacaTrails.org site is now live, but public rollout is slated for April, with many guided public hikes scheduled to highlight the resource. The Tompkins County Visitors Center will offer "rec cards," with guides for hikes on many of the 240 miles of county trails, in conjunction with Finger Lake State Parks, Cornell Natural Areas, the local Land Trust and many others. Volunteers are needed for a guided hike on the Jim Schug Trail. Links to the new trails site will be added to every town's website, and there will be a local ad campaign on Google search. Todd said the new maps on the trail site help make clear the gaps in connections around the county, including the needed link between Ithaca and Dryden.

**Next meeting: 7 pm Wednesday, March 15 in the FREEVILLE VILLAGE HALL**

**Meeting Adjourned at 8:56 pm**

Submitted by Alice Walsh Green