

INTRODUCING A COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED TOWN OF DRYDEN RAIL-TRAIL PROJECT



Left photo © Bard V. Prentiss

A Rails-to-Trails Conversion in Dryden

Many Dryden residents are aware that extensive abandoned rail beds run through the Town; they have long awaited the day when they could follow the route from one end of town to the other. The newly formed group Friends of the Dryden Rail Trail are very excited that the rail beds will soon be repurposed as a multiuse trail to provide recreational and commuting opportunities, as well as encourage walkers and riders from beyond the Town to visit Dryden. Taking their cue from a groundswell of community enthusiasm for this project and believing that this trail will be a beneficial development for all residents, this volunteer group and a Task Force appointed by the Dryden Town Board are working to create a rail trail along the route—a Rails-to-Trails conversion.

Recreational Opportunities of a Rail Trail

Abandoned rail beds make ideal multiuse trails, as they are wide with only modest gradual slopes, with a smooth cinder or paved surface. They accommodate a variety of users: pedestrians, bicyclists, skiers and horseback riders. They also offer easy access for disabled individuals and families with strollers. A rail trail in Dryden will provide extensive safe recreational possibilities away from traffic dangers and noise. It will allow people of all abilities to get out and enjoy Dryden—its beautiful and interesting natural, agricultural, suburban and village environments.

Commuter and Community Links Reestablished (See map)

Dryden already has two well-established and successful rails-to-trails conversions (which will be part of the completed trail): the Jim Schug Trail, starting east of Agway on Route 13 in the Village of Dryden, running past Dryden Lake and ending on Lake Road near the County line; and the Freeville Trail with access from Johnson Road and Union Street in the Village of Freeville. In other areas of Tompkins County, the East Ithaca Recreation Way, the South Hill Recreation Way and the Black Diamond Trail are good examples of converted rail beds.

Up until the 1970s these rail lines were part of a larger rail system that linked our communities and moved passengers and cargo to destinations near and far. The Dryden Rail Trail will again link Dryden to Ithaca and the rest of Tompkins County via its hook-up with the East Ithaca Recreation Way, which extends now to Game Farm Road. The Dryden Rail Trail will serve as a commuter route by bicycle or on foot to work places, schools, community centers, stores and parks both within Dryden and to other towns linked by rail trails. Commuters can enjoy healthy exercise--while at the same time reducing their driving and parking costs as well as their “carbon footprint.” It will connect residential neighborhoods and allow walking and biking along a quiet green corridor, as many of us remember doing in a less traffic-heavy world.

Economic Benefits

Homeowners living next to the trail will experience not only enjoyment of a “linear park,” but often an increase in the value of their homes as well. In addition, the trail will provide a corridor for possible future development along its route. Some of the

Tompkins County Priority Trails Map



Tompkins County Priority Trails Vision | Page 3

From: "Tompkins Priority Trails Strategy: A Vision of Networked Trails in Tompkins County," Tompkins County Parks & Trails Network, 14 pgs., 2014.

most successful rail trail projects in the country have spurred housing, business and tourist facilities along their route, some promoting their location as “along the rail trail.” A rail trail is a popular destination for recreational bicyclists, runners, walkers, skiers, birders and other nature observers. Dryden has a great deal to recommend it as such a destination; having a rail trail will attract visitors and help to develop a more vibrant tourist industry consistent with Town development goals.

Developing the Trail

The development of the trail depends on the good will and full understanding of landowners through whose property the rail beds run. The rail beds were deeded back to landowners in the late 1970s and early 1980s after they were abandoned by the railroads—local authorities not imagining that the rail beds would be a desirable community asset in the future. Now the Town is obtaining easements from landowners to allow the rail beds to be developed as a trail.

Only minimal cost of developing the trail will be borne by Town taxpayers. The volunteer Task Force and Friends groups are hard at work obtaining grant funding for this project, encouraged by the fact that nearly 40% of the rail trail is complete, as represented by Dryden’s previously established trail segments. There is a great deal of encouragement for this kind of trail building and recouping of useful rail beds at the Federal, State and private foundation levels, so we anticipate adequate funding from outside sources.

The Friends group and Task Force welcome suggestions from landowners along the route and other stakeholders as to how to make this project work for them in the best possible way. Continuing on from Cornell Design Connect’s excellent “Town of Dryden Rail Trail Concept Plan, Spring 2015,” volunteers are meeting with each landowner to understand their response to this project and to hear their concerns. Questions that are often asked in relation to Rails-to-Trails conversions are addressed in the Frequently-Asked-Questions (FAQ) section.

Easements

Easements along the length of the rail trail provide a right of passage to users—walkers, runners, bicyclists, skiers and horseback riders. No motorized vehicles will be allowed except motorized wheelchairs, electric-assist bicycles, and maintenance and emergency vehicles. Dogs are allowed on leash. Trail users are only allowed on the designated rights of way and must respect the rights of the property owner and abide by all posted regulations.

Easement agreements between rail-bed landowners and the Town of Dryden become a permanent part of land title, recorded by the County Clerk, ensuring that future owners comply with all terms of the easement. The landowner retains most rights to the land, including the right to sell, lease, transfer or mortgage the land, and any other uses that are consistent with the terms of the easement and local regulation.

The Town is responsible for maintenance of the trail, and terms of the easement specify that the landowner is not liable for personal injury or property damage to any person who uses the trail.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q: What kind of activities will the trail be used for?

A: Recreational activities such as walking, jogging, bicycling, horseback riding, snowshoeing, hiking and cross-country skiing.

Q: What will be the economic impact on the community?

A: Many trail systems create a positive economic impact for adjacent communities.

Q: What effect will the trail have on landowners' property value?

A: A survey found that eighty-seven percent of landowners with property adjacent to three rail-trails believed that the trails either increased the value of their properties or had no effect. The majority of owners reported that living near the trails was better than they had expected, and that living near the trails was better than living near the abandoned railroad lines before the trails were constructed.

Q: What effect will the trail have on crime rate?

A: Research suggests that homeowners experience numerous social benefits as a result of their proximity to rail-trail systems. A study of a 12.1-mile bicycle and pedestrian trail showed that homes immediately adjacent to the trail had lower rates of burglary and vandalism than the neighborhood average. Actually, what frequently happens is that the more a trail is used, the lower the crime rate is.

Q: Do landowners have additional liability if the trail goes by their property?

A: A Trail Easement agreement with the Town will indemnify (hold harmless) the landowner against any claims, costs or liability for personal injury or property damage to any person using the trail. In addition, the Recreational Use Statute in New York State limits a landowner's liability if a visitor is injured on private land, providing that the owner does not charge a fee for use of the land.

Q: Will landowners lose their privacy if the trail runs through their property?

A: Fences, gates, and shrubbery or trees may be installed to provide screening to the adjacent properties, especially if residences are close to the trail and/or landowners desire such screening. People who are involved in maintaining the vegetation/fences will be sensitive about preserving the landowners' privacy and will be willing to discuss and address any issues that may arise in the process. In studies of rail trails, 75 to 80 percent of adjacent landowners indicated that loss of privacy was not an issue or had decreased or not changed since the trail opening.

Q: What will the trail be like in the winter?

A: It will remain open so that winter activities can take place.

Q: Who will be responsible for maintenance of the trail?

A: The Town and volunteers will maintain the trail.

Q: Will parking be provided for trail users?

A: Parking lots will be installed at roadway intersections along the route.

Q: What about noise pollution?

A: The only time noise will be a factor would be during initial construction. Since no motorized vehicles (except for emergencies and maintenance) will be allowed on

the trail, after that there should be no noise problem.

Q: Will landowners be able to drive equipment over a portion of the trail?

A: While motorized vehicles will not be allowed on the trail, specific exceptions will be made for landowners who need to use it for access.

Q: What if a visitor sees a farmer using standard practices (e.g. pesticide spraying or manure spreading) and complains?

A: Agriculture and its necessary practices will not be affected in any way.

Q: What will happen during hunting season?

A: Hunting is prohibited on the trail, but landowners can still hunt on their own property.

Q: Will landowners' dogs be safe from trail users' dogs?

A: Trail users will have to keep their dogs on leash. There will be dog waste bags available on the trail.

Q: What if visitors leave the trail and walk through a landowner's garden or crops?

A: Trail signs will state "Stay on the Trail," and "Please Respect the Rights of Adjacent Landowners." If a trespasser is found, local law enforcement officials should be alerted.

Q: Will the public use the facility enough to be worth the expense and effort of putting in a trail?

A: The completed portions of the trail are already used extensively. Once the trail is developed further, it is anticipated that more residents and visitors will make use of it for both recreation and commuting.

Additional Information

Town of Dryden website – Find many informative rail-trail resources here:

<http://dryden.ny.us/board-commission-list/rail-trail-task-force>

Facebook: Friends of Dryden Rail Trail

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