

Dryden Rail Trail Friends and Task Force
Minutes of the Meeting
7:00 – 9:00 p.m. Monday May 20, 2019
Varna Community Center

Attendance: Bob Beck, David Fogel, Susan Ashdown, Deb Siegert, Chuck Geisler, Bruno Schickel, Steve Winans, Bob O'Malley, Janice and Tony Bretscher, Todd Bittner, Alice Green, Chris and Diane TH, John Lampman and son.

Call to order (7:04 p.m.) – Bob Beck

Additions to agenda: Dairy Days planning

Approval of April minutes

Celebration! The meeting opened with a celebration of the success of the Dryden-Freeville Trail Opening event and of the award of a \$1.5 million NYSDOT TAP grant and a \$50,000 County Tourism Capital Grant. Todd provided champagne and Bob brought cookies. Members toasted the good news and thanked Todd and Bob for their work on the grants, and Susan & many volunteers for the event.

Grants Background– Todd, Bob

Todd explained grant history for the trail so far. First, in 2017, the project received an award from NYS Parks authorizing a total \$365,000 in trail spending, of which the Town will match \$182,000.

Next in 2018, the trail was approved for a \$26,000 Strategic Tourism Grant from Tompkins County Tourism to study alternatives for the trail to cross Route 13. That same spring, in a national competition, the trail received an \$8,000 grant from AARP to build and install kiosks and benches. Then in 2019, the County encouraged the Task Force to apply for a County Tourism Capital grant, and last month announced \$50,000 in funding for the project. County Planning also recently awarded the project a \$5,000 Parks and Trails grant. Cornell University's Office of Community relations also announced a \$10,000 grant towards the project.

Todd noted that the County and Cornell grants can serve as part of the local match for the NYS Parks grant, and that work remaining under the Parks grant once the TAP grant contract is signed can also be applied as partial match to the TAP grant.

When the Town of Dryden authorized the application for the current TAP grant, it committed to finding matching funding for the \$2.2 million project. This covers the Route 13 bridge, stone dust surface from Game Farm to Pinckney Rd, and spur trails down to and back from the Route 13 bridge at Fall Creek (which western spur trail is part of the NYS Parks grant).

Unlike the Parks grant, the TAP grant guidelines don't allow matching work to start at the announcement of the award, but only after the contract is signed. A Task Force delegation will meet with DOT officials in Syracuse on Thursday to get more information about the TAP grant timeline and procedures. Bob said the project must be reviewed by the Albany Attorney General's office, a process that can be very lengthy. But he added that there may be some things we can do to speed this up. He said he received a letter from Mark Freschette at DOT who said he hopes to streamline the process, taking into account the fact that the trail project has already started.

Bruno said he doesn't want to hold up local work on the Game Farm trestles which could account for about \$40,000 of the local match. Todd said he hopes such work can move forward. At some point the Task Force will need to do a cost benefit analysis of our choices about timing local work this year, versus waiting until the TAP contract is signed so it can be used as part of the local match.

On the other grant announcement, Todd said that the \$50,000 County Tourism grant includes a requirement to document increasing use of the trail. This will involve developing some new methods to indicate who, when, and how the trail is used. Todd said feedback on the Tourism application was that it was strong on all but marketing trail use, so this is an area for development.

Installed: Three kiosk panel sets & three benches – Bruno

Informational panels were installed at the Freeville, George Rd and Dryden kiosks, and benches were installed at Elm St and at the kiosks in Freeville and Dryden by Bruno and Dean Russo before the Dryden-Freeville opening May 11. Bruno thanked Diane and committee for the excellent design of the panels.

Post-event report: Dryden to Freeville Trail Celebration – Event Committee & more (Susan, Diane, Rose, Judy, Chuck, Alice, John Lampman, Deb Siegert)

- Susan thanked the “amazing event planning committee,” which met every Sunday for weeks prior to the opening. She said she had been concerned about whether the planning would be adequate, but when she explained what was underway, folks at the Tompkins Festivals group were reassuring. That group donated use of event items including the portable stage and ten pop-up tents, which were erected all along the 3-mile section.
- Deb, who joined as volunteer coordinator in the last planning weeks, said she “still has that warm feeling from the event.” She was “humbled by how many volunteers came out.” She had also been thinking about what would work better next time.
- Chuck said, “I think this was such a boost to community relations! It set a fabulous precedent. This kind of animation and good will are just what we want.” County tourism officials praised the good promotion.
- Bruno said he did a rough count of 250 people. There were 33 participants in fun run, and 16 people on the bird walk saw 56 different types of birds. Rick John, a county legislator, biked out with his family from Ithaca. The speeches were very well received, and Dennis and Nate Mix, of Mix Brothers Construction, were surprised and moved when awarded Trail Master plaques.
- The golden spike driving ceremony included all the local leaders
- John reported that event parking went well. There weren’t a lot of cars parked in designated areas in Dryden Village; Freeville was filled but parking was adequate. Not many people tried to get into the event at Old George Rd. Toward the end there were people parking on George Rd. A Sheriff’s Department deputy was a great help in traffic control, as were the barrels set up by DPW.
- Alice said the Dryden Rec Department shuttle worked well for transporting fun runners and volunteers from the William George parking area to the event entrance at the George Rd crossing in the morning, and visitors back to the villages in the afternoon.
- Gator rides were also helpful for folks unable to walk the trail. Bruno suggested maybe offering this once a month for those who are mobility impaired; for example a fall leaf peeping event. One suggestion was using an electric powered gator rather than a gas-fueled one on the trail.
- Several people commented that the Lime Bikes were a real asset. The company provided twelve at each village; half were pedal assist e-bikes. The trail was still rough for bikes, one user said.
- Dave Davies, who volunteered as event photographer, rode an e-bike from Freeville. Jason Russo, a William George agency life skills teacher, made RR crossing signs. Bob (& Bruno) said they can store these for future uses.
- Diane set up an online site to collect photos, and got pictures from several folks including terrific photos of participants by Dave Davies and Mike Murphy. She’s hoping to get one of the sunlit “fire rainbow,” technically a circumhorizontal arc, that appeared over the pavilion during the event
- Chuck noted the wonderful quality of the speakers, and Amy’s outstanding work as emcee. He said all were really well prepared.
- Bruno thought the signage on the podium and elsewhere provided plenty of promotion for the sponsors. The children’s games were a real hit. The free Raffle Tickets worked well, as did the paid raffle tickets.

- The committee thanked Diane for staffing the Rail Trail merchandise table during the entire event, and Susan for her handmade donations.
- Todd suggested another future fundraiser, used by Cornell Botanic Gardens in the past, could be a “photo booth,” allowing folks to get their pictures taken behind a photo frame at a scenic spot. The digital shots are then emailed to participants, which also expanded the projects email list.
- In answer to a question, Bob said that all volunteer time on permanent items like signs on the trail will count for the Parks grant, but none of the promotional work on this event counts as a local match.

Game Farm Road crossing: Planning with County Highway Dept. — Bob, Alice, and Todd

- Bob contacted County Board chair Martha Robertson to talk to her about the need to have an at-grade crossing at Game Farm, rather than waiting for construction for an under the Cascadilla Creek bridge crossing. After meeting with Bob in April, Martha called a meeting of all stakeholders on site on May 16.
- Alice said it was an extremely productive session because it allowed sharing of information and perspectives from Rail Trail leaders, the Towns of Dryden and Ithaca, Cornell Transportation and Natural Areas, County Legislature and County Highway.
- The session opened with a discussion of the space that was included under the new Game Farm Rd Bridge to allow later construction of a path to take trail users under the bridge. Unfortunately, there were several problems with that plan: it would require difficult easements from the DEC and Cornell, there is no current funding, and it would take significant space in a sloped, protected Cornell natural area to get a flat enough trail for ADA compliance.
- Bob noted that many or most users are likely to go directly across Game Farm Road at grade, rather than take a long spur trail. So it is essential to provide a safe and well signed at-grade crossing.
- County Highway Director Jeff Smith said his concern is that the county could incur liability if it designated an at-grade crossing where sight lines to the crossing are short. He said the next time the county does road re-surfacing, they can remove the bump in the road to the north of the crossing that causes sight-line issues, but this wouldn't happen right away.
- Cornell Transportation Planner Reed Heugerich said Cornell has studied the corridor, and he does not believe the County would add liability by creating the safe at-grade crossing.
- There was a discussion about lowering the speed limit from 55 to 45 MPH. Town of Ithaca Supervisor Bill Goodman and Alice agreed to work with their Town Boards and the County Highway to petition the NYS Department of Transportation for that speed reduction.
- There was talk about slowing down trail walkers and bikers by installing gates or bollards on both sides of the road.
- It was noted that if a safe, ADA compliant at-grade crossing were approved, it could allow for later construction of a non-ADA compliant spur trail under the bridge, which would require a much smaller footprint.
- Jeff Smith said the County would need to have an engineer-stamped study of an at-grade crossing, including a look at traffic volume, signage, crossing stripes and flashing lights. Bob said has talked with retired country highway engineer John Lampman about providing this service.
- It won't be possible to open the Game Farm trail section officially until the crossing is approved, but once the trestles there are repaired, the Task Force had planned a fall soft opening similar to that of of the Dryden-Freeville section.
- Todd also talked about creating more formalized shoulder parking along east side of the road.
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Quotes for trail and road signs — Bob, Bruno

Bob said he is still working with Rick Young and vendors to get proofs and prices for signs that we thought would be in place to mark road crossings before the opening event. That includes push button operated, solar powered crossing signs, and our welcome sign with logo and basic trail rules, to be mounted back-to-back with a small stop sign and the name of the approaching road. Last year, Bruno located a vendor who supplied three reflective oval logo signs.

Prefab boardwalk offer — Bob

Roger Hopkins of Lansing, and the Finger Lakes Trails group, called to say they want to sell 60 feet of prefab boardwalk that a company donated to them. It's stored in Virgil. Bruno said he might think of a spot where it could be used, but advised not to buy it without a specific location. Todd: If you put it in a wetland, it must have good footers. If you put that together with the purchase costs and ongoing maintenance costs, this might not be cost-effective for the main trail. It could be a nice amenity for a pull off to a scenic spot.

Update: trestle renovation plan — Bruno

Structural engineer, Gary Bush hasn't yet given his opinion for Bruno's plan for the Game Farm trestle repair. This will have to go to DEC for approval. Bruno thinks each bridge will take about a day's worth of carpentry work. There will also be prep and other finish work. There's a fair amount of machine work for DPW to do, Bruno estimated.

Easements update — Bob, Bruno

The County Planning Department is still working with landowners to purchase a property west of Etna and East of Pinckney Rd. for conservation. This is the last easement needed in that section. Bob noted that the Town Attorney is seeking an easement for the rail bed (to the centerline) currently owned Vanguard Press (formerly Wilcox Press) at the east side of Route 13. Bruno reported the "bad news" that Bernie Cornelius is back from Florida and his wife said they have decided not to grant the easement for a long section of their property parallel to the rail bed corridor between Kirk Rd and Freeville. Bruno said he would continue to work on alternatives.

Dairy Day DRT booth:

Alice said the Rail Trail is registered for a booth at Dairy Day, June 8, and volunteers are needed to staff it and sell trail items created for the opening. The following members signed up: Janice and Tony Bretscher, Steve Winans, Chuck Geisler, Deb Siegert and Bob Beck. The DRT cow can go into Time Square May 29. Diane T-H volunteered to staff the booth at the Dryden Lake Festival July 27.

State Parks Signage

There was a short discussion about where a sign acknowledging NYS State Parks funding should be placed.

Next meeting scheduled for 7 pm Monday June 17 at Freeville Village Hall.

Adjournment at 9:07 pm

Respectfully submitted by Alice Walsh Green