

**Dryden Rail-Trail Friends and Task Force
Minutes of the May 17, 2017 Meeting
Dryden Town DPW**

Attendance: Bob Beck, Chair, Bruno Schickel, Vice Chair, David Bravo-Cullen, Armin Heurich, Todd Bittner, David Fogel, Alice Green, Diane Tessaglia-Hymes, Chris Tessaglia-Hymes, Judy Pierpont, Dan Lamb, John Kiefer, Cindy Marquis, Otis Phillips, Mark Anderson, Nan Brown, Celia Brown.

Call to order (7:03 p.m.) – Bob Beck

Discussion of trail map, easements and objections

Bruno laid out a new large map of the trail, detailing which sections have easements secured. Cindy Marquis said she was attending the meeting to say that she does not want the trail to cross her property. She suggested the group work on fund raising for a work around that could continue the trail off her property. Otis Phillips echoed her objection to the trail, as did Mark Anderson. Bob and Bruno thanked them for coming, and emphasized that the task force is committed to working with property owners along the rail bed, and will concentrate on the many sections that have easements and building as much of the trail as possible. They noted that the Town of Dryden owns utility easements across the entire railroad corridor from Dryden to Ithaca.

DOT/TAP grant application: close but no cigar this time – Bob

Dryden's application for rail trail funding from the Department of Transportation/ Transportation Alternatives Program was not approved. Although County Transportation and DOT officials were very encouraging during the application process, other projects in the county apparently got more points in the grant determination process. The next DOT funding cycle is in two years.

USA Today competition: Voting ended 5/12; most-voted videos now go to judges – Bob

Bob thanked all those who voted for the video representing the trail project. The nationwide competition will recognize selected local projects.

Upcoming grant application to NYS Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation (NYS OPRHP) – John, Bruno, Bob

NYS Parks, Rec & Historic Preservation will award \$19.8 million statewide this year. John, Bruno and Bob met with Finger Lakes State Parks officials and John will work on the application, which is due July 28. Percentages of required local match depend on income levels of local communities, as measured on census tracts. The rail trail project crosses two tracts where the grant would be matched 50/50, and another where the grant covers 75% and the local match would be 25%. Volunteer and town staff labor can be applied towards the local match.

NYS OPRHP trail specifications differ from DOT's. It is not required to have stone dust or paved surface (which greatly increases the cost) in the initial phase. It may be finished to grass or gravel as the Schug trail section is now.

John said that the Task Force needs to identify which parts of the trail would be focus of the grant proposal. The question of how to cross Route 13 remains. The DOT is to evaluate alternatives including routing the trail north to cross under the bridge, or south to the intersection of Rtes. 13 and 366. Bob described a new kind of on-demand crossing mechanism with flashing lights, an option that would allow a safe direct passage across Route 13.

Armin suggested contacting three people who were instrumental in securing NYS Parks support

for the successful Black Diamond Trail.

Cindy asked for assurance that no grants would be sought for the rail trail section across her property. Bruno reiterated that only sections with trail easements will be chosen for fund raising efforts.

Report on meeting with Ken Lynch, DEC Executive Deputy Commissioner and follow-up with Ken L. and Barbara Lifton – Dan Lamb, Todd, Bob

Dan said Ken Lynch was very favorable to revisiting the issue of building the trail across the DEC owned Game Farm property. Lynch told the Task Force group that he will help with the easement, and also work with Cornell on issues related to their Compost Facility and Agricultural Fields area easement for the trail. He was aware of past history, and misperceptions on the part of sportsmen's groups about the trail. Todd noted that the trail project will have little impact on the Game Farm operation, and in fact will support the mission of the Game Farm.

There was also discussion of new bridge construction at Game Farm Rd. Todd reported that the county has put the project out to bid. The specifications call for moving the north bridge abutment to accommodate the trail going under the new bridge. An extra connection to get from the end of the East Ithaca Recreation trail to the bridge was not included in the project. There are issues with the grade, the creek and the parking lot.

Update on Trail Easements and Town Board approvals, with map of progress to date along trail route – Bruno, Bob

Bob and Bruno have now met with all 36 landowners along the trail route. Some owners, including Cornell, have more than one parcel. There are 13 completed trail easements, and 17 more are pledged. About half a dozen more are still in discussion.

Bruno said William George Agency officials are supportive of a slight expansion from the old railroad property for their easement; the director has been authorized to sign it after review by the agency attorney. He explained that the expansion allows for a 600 foot run that allows a 30 foot rise at the George Road crossing, to stay at no greater than 5% slope. This eliminates the need for a culvert as the crossing or easements from two adjacent property owners. He said the steeply sloped area will need "fill and good engineering to prevent erosion." The new arrangement also provides an opportunity for a small parking lot adjacent to the trail. Armin underlined the need for good pull offs for parking along the trail to avoid using road shoulders.

Bruno reported that a property owner in Varna is now ready to give an easement, and would be receptive to having the section cleared. He also said local NYSEG officials have forwarded trail easement paperwork to their Rochester office for approval.

Plans for Rail-Trail tables at Dryden Dairy Day and Dryden Lake Festival – Alice

The Friends of the Dryden Rail Trail will have a booth at Dairy Day Saturday, June 10, with the goal to publicize both the project and to invite people to the Community Trail-Design Workshop the following Saturday. Sign ups for staffing the booth were circulated. Diane volunteered to create an invitation card and a flier for the workshop that can be distributed at Dairy Day.

Update on plans for Rail-Trail-Design Community Workshop (charette) on June 17th and meetings with facilitators, David Cutter & Reed Huegerich – Alice, Todd, Diane, David F., Bob

The workshop subcommittee has been meeting to plan an engaging session to get public feedback

about themes, names, uses and design of amenities for the trail. It will feature railroad history, an overview of the project, and time for input in small groups. Judy suggested that it would be good to have examples of trail amenities from other places at each table, since the slides at the opening of the program may not stay in people's memories as they work on details for the trail. She said a video of trail use would also be effective. Bob will coordinate with Town Hall on mailing invitations to all landowners along the trail owning of portions of the rail bed or property within 200 feet.

Update on plans for volunteer trail work and youth employment & meetings with Lexi Hartley of Cornell Cooperative Extension – Alice, Milo

A crew of middle schoolers will spend four mornings in July helping to clear a section of the trail off Route 366 in Etna, as part of the Town of Dryden's Project Lead. Milo has volunteered to head up the project, and will be working with Lexi Hartley of Cornell Cooperative Extension. Judy Auble Zazzara, who lives next door to the trail section, is enthusiastic about the project. She and her husband are willing to allow use of a section of their property for a trail parking area. She also facilitated getting the group permission to use Houtz Hall as headquarters for the week.

Financing for the Trail

In answer to a question from guests at the meeting, Bruno explained that he feels the funding for the trail should not come from Dryden taxpayers, but rather from private donations, state and federal grants. He gave the recently built playground at Montgomery Park as an example where the community raised \$60,000 from donations and deep discounts from local businesses. He wants to design the trail in a way that's cost effective and that gets the community involved in building some of its amenities.

Todd cited statistics on the strong economic benefits to communities crossed by recreational/commuting trails. He said this trail is part of a broader, 240-mile network that promotes tourism diversifying the town's economic base, and community wellness. The point is to pull together communities. Mark Anderson asked about whether property assessments will be raised. Bob said it's unlikely to raise assessments in any given year, but the trail will likely raise re-sale values.

Trail Maintenance

Otis asked about how the trail will be maintained, and suggested selling trail passes, as is done for certain snowmobile areas. The trail will not be plowed in winter, to allow skiers to use it, but it won't be open to motorized vehicles other than electric assist bikes and wheelchairs. Armin suggested an alternative approach, the stewardship model, where local groups or neighborhoods take responsibility for maintaining different sections. This would be similar to Adopt-A-Highway programs, but he pointed out, trail maintenance is much less expensive than highway maintenance.

Next meeting – 7 pm Wednesday, June 21, in Houtz Hall, Etna.

Adjourned at 9:02 pm