

Dryden Rail Trail Friends and Task Force
Minutes of the Meeting Monday, January 18, 2021
7:00 – 8:30 p.m. Via Zoom

Attendance: John Kiefer, Bob Beck, Judy Pierpont, Alice Green, Todd Bittner, Chris and Diane Tessaglia-Hymes, Susan Ashdown, Margaret Johnson, Victoria Armstrong, Loren Sparling, Karl Kolesnikoff, Valerie Salerno, Dan Lamb, Rose Borzik, Craig Schutt, Clay Converse, Steve Winans, Tony Salerno

Call to order at **7:02 pm – Bob Beck, Alice Green**

Additions to agenda: 1) Alice on conversation with Bruno and 2) Dan with update on the Game Farm MOU

Approval of December minutes (this item was skipped)

Overview of Trail Development – Bob

Bob shared a map of the trail with a quick description of trail progress.

Route 13-bridge project (meeting w/NYS DOT & Erdman Anthony) – Bridge Subcommittee

Todd explained the work of the bridge subcommittee over the past year, noting that it recently has reviewed about 13 different iterations of possible alignments across Route 13. Paul Presutti from project engineers Erdman Anthony (EA) has provided some preliminary cost figures for the designs. The bridge subcommittee was concerned about the fact that those preliminary costs were higher than indicated in the initial engineering study for the bridge.

The subcommittee requested a meeting with reps from the NYS Department of Transportation (DOT), County transportation and EA to explain the cost difficulties within the current space constraints and to ask for assistance. Representing DOT were Mark Frechette, Planning and Program Management Director, who been involved with the project from the start, Julie Baldwin and two others.

Some of the design difficulty resulted from the constraint that the bridge and abutments need to stay within the grandfathered, original 66-foot “break in access” rail bed corridor across Route 13. DOT reps had indicated that deviation would require a very lengthy permission process. At the meeting, they clarified that it’s possible parts of the ramp and embankments could be outside the 66 feet in the DOT clearance area. This could have significant impact on the costs of the project.

Todd shared a map of the working design that was created for determining preliminary costs, as well as a list of costs for individual project elements. He said two of the main costs of the bridge are the actual span of the structure, and the planned abutments and earthen structure ramps. The committee explored with DOT and the engineers several ways to lower the costs.

- One option would be reducing the span of the bridge, bringing the abutments closer to the highway. Dot was amendable, but some safety barriers would be needed. EA thought this could still reduce the cost of the project.
- Another idea to reduce costs is to narrow the width of the ramp off the bridge for a trail 8 feet in width, from the 10-foot width on the bridge.
- A third cost saving approach could be to reduce the fencing from the bridge to less than all the way to the base of the ramp, which wouldn't create any safety issues. DOT agreed.
- Trail surface sub-base might not need to be as expensive because of the existing RR bed.
- DOT also agreed to allow Town DPW to complete the scope of work for trail surfacing, so more of the grant can be applied to the bridge.

Todd said there are so many questions remaining; it's not realistic to plan to go to construction in Fall 2021. It's common for projects of this sort to take 2 years to go to construction. So the bridge subcommittee asked EA to pause the project design until DOT confirms the footprint it will allow.

Judy asked if the federal TAP money (\$1.5 million) would still be available with this delay. Those funds were renewed through the end of this year. Todd thinks infrastructure improvement funds will continue because they are job creators. The Project also has \$0.5 million Multi-Modal funding, which is good until 2026.

Susan said that, as a frequent user of the section from Monkey Run road to Route 13, she can confirm that it already has a very solid base and wouldn't require extensive and expensive sub-base.

Letter from Bruno about “guiding principles” he asks the Task Force to adopt – Alice

Alice began with a reminder that on the Martin Luther King Day of Service, we can be thankful for the work of Task Force members to create a trail that will be of great service to the community.

She called Bruno yesterday to explain to him the new information about possibilities for reducing the cost of the bridge that the subcommittee learned last week. Since the project is still in the fact-finding mode, she believes it would be premature to draw any lines in the sand.

Regarding Bruno's principles, she said she believes every Task Force member wants to keep trail costs as low as possible, and no one wishes to engage in any coercion.

She said it is simply not true that the Town has initiated taking anyone's property. The Town did ask DOT to look at the market value of two properties on the east side of the bridge. She emphasized that multiple steps would be taken if the subcommittee decided it was necessary to acquire small portions of one or two properties for an economical bridge. The Town Board would need to approve any land acquisition, and would hold a public hearing first.

Alice said she was confused by Bruno's sudden letter to the list serve stating his opposition to the costs of the bridge and to the use of eminent domain, when he had been working so closely with the bridge subcommittee. He had been willing to

consider eminent domain for a small portion of a commercial property, and even brought his own recommendation for a bridge alignment that would have required using eminent domain for two properties, the commercial and also a residential one.

She was especially confused that the letter stated the Task Force had violated the principles he laid out, since they were aspirational and never formally adopted. She said she pleaded with Bruno to stick with the project and continue helping to shape its direction.

Nancy apologized for her “rant” on the list serve about the use of eminent domain. She said from the letter, she thought DOT had been approved to go ahead with eminent domain. But Town Planning Director Ray Burger confirmed to her that DOT had only been asked to look at market values of two properties near Route 13.

Victoria said that when she saw the lively conversation on the list serve, she went to Fernando D’Aragon to get a list of costs for similar transportation projects. She wanted to provide a context for looking at biking/walking infrastructure compared with automobile/truck road construction. She cautioned against cutting corners, like reducing sections of the trail to 8-foot wide, because of the need for safety when bikes and pedestrians are passing.

John K thanked the Task Force for addressing Bruno’s letter, and not proceeding with business as usual. He said he also had come to a point where he had a crisis of confidence that this group would make decisions he could live with. One that pushed him over the edge was that when Bruno asked the TF to take a hard stance on forcing people to sell their property, it did not take action. He felt this response was the wrong one.

John said he walks the Schug trail section every single day. A couple years ago he and his wife picked up 24 bags of garbage along that section. He asked himself whether he’d want to have the trail run close to his property, and the answer was no. He does not like the notion that the Town would force people to grant easements, so folks could walk on it and trash it. He said he couldn’t live with the TF being unwilling to write down what our principles are.

Todd said he does hope we can fulfill the aspirational principles that everything we need will be provided by willing landowners, and that we will keep costs as low as possible for the Town. He still thinks that’s how we want to approach this project. We have a whole year to continue efforts to gain necessary easements and bring costs down.

Margaret asked if the one-year delay was because of not having all the info needed to go to construction, or for more time to work with landowners. Bob said both.

Todd said these projects often take two years; Fall 2021 had been a pretty aggressive timeline. We’re still in preliminary design. The next step is presenting designs for public hearings. There were many steps before we go to construction.

Nancy asked about slopes for the embankments. Todd explained that the current idea is a 2-to-1 slope to avoid more expensive construction to hold a steeper slope in place. She asked if it would be possible to present a possibility that is built only within existing easements. Todd and Bob spent some additional time tracing on the map the way the trail can avoid impacting the residential property.

John said he doesn’t object to impacting the commercial property. He’s thinking

of the residential property owners. He wants the Task Force to put in writing for residential and agricultural property owners that they won't take their property.

Todd said if the DOT were willing to shift the 66 feet, there would be more flexibility to remove impact on residential property.

Vikki said you should do as much as possible to avoid taking advantage of any property owners, however if the project to the point where an amicable transfer is impossible, the state can take over. She reminded members that this is a transportation alternative, and the state often takes land for automobile transportation. Acknowledging trail, maintenance issues, she said it's also important to develop a culture of care for the trail.

Susan said there is a real culture of care for the Monkey Run section of the trail. Since it has become a more public trail, it's a friendlier place. We can develop ways to keep the trail maintained. She emphasized the transportation corridor that the trail will become.

Rose thanked the group for their work.

Game Farm MOU

Bob displayed a map of the Game Farm Area, noting that Game Farm Road crossing planning is moving forward, now that the Town has received word of a 3-way MOU between the County and the Towns of Ithaca and Dryden.

Dan said the Town Attorney and other Town officials have reviewed the 20-year occupancy and use agreement provided by the DEC. The Town has proposed minor changes, such as allowing horses and e-assist bikes, and sent them back to DEC. Horses are allowed on the East Ithaca Recreation way from Maple Ave to Game Farm Rd.

Next meeting scheduled for Feb. 15 via Zoom

Adjournment: at 8:49 pm

Respectfully submitted by Alice Walsh Green