



TOWN OF ITHACA NEW YORK

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Press Release
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The town supervisors of Ithaca, Dryden, Caroline, and Danby are excited to announce that they have negotiated an agreement with NYSEG to extend the South Hill Recreation Way Trail approximately 8 miles to the Tompkins County/Tioga County border on the former Ithaca & Owego railroad bed property owned by NYSEG. This will provide a direct and safe recreational and commuter pathway between the southeastern part of the county and Ithaca. *“While safely delivering energy is our priority, collaborating with local officials on initiatives that benefit the communities we serve is foundational to who we are as a member of those communities,”* said Trish Nilsen, president and CEO of NYSEG and RG&E. *“That’s why we were happy to work with the towns of Dryden, Ithaca, Caroline, and Danby to enable the South Hill Recreation Way Trail to extend on NYSEG land, promoting healthy lifestyles and recreation, and making more land available for all to enjoy.”*

This has been a work-in-progress for over 15 years. This project supports community goals and will add significantly to the Tompkins County trail network. The partners were successful in securing the assistance of a student-run design and planning organization at Cornell University (Design Connect) to help identify the challenges and recommend actions that will need to be taken to bring the trail up to full useability. The next step is for each municipality, following a public hearing, to consider adopting the recreational easement agreement with NYSEG. The partners plan to then pursue grant applications for an engineering study, trail design, and ultimately trail construction. An important part of the project will be to minimize possible impacts on nearby residents. From Caroline Supervisor Mark Witmer: *“There’s enormous support and anticipation in the community for this rail trail project that will connect neighbors and destinations. We look forward to making this a reality for our community.”*

Railbeds provide an excellent foundation for recreational trails and can often be used with modest improvements. Joel Gagnon, Danby Town Supervisor, stated *“The partners believe that the first 2 legs of the trail extension (Burns to German Cross and German Cross to Banks roads) can be developed at minimal expense and relatively quickly. Other legs will follow as funding allows, but this agreement with NYSEG is a hugely positive step forward.”*

There are enormous community benefits to rail trails. Jason Leifer, Town of Dryden Supervisor, noted, *“Studies consistently show that turning old rail beds into recreation and commuter trails connect communities, promotes recreation, and increases tourism. Rail trails improve the quality of life for everyone.”*

Rod Howe, Town of Ithaca Supervisor, adds, *“This represents a great example of intermunicipal collaboration that has multiple positive impacts.”*

We are fortunate that NYSEG has preserved an important piece of our heritage and is now making it available to the community, for today and future generations.

Contact any of the Town Supervisors for more information. If you are interested in getting involved in a Friends of South Hill Trail group, contact Bill Goodman via email at billg@ecovillage.ithaca.ny.us.