

Taunton River Trail Committee

Summary of the Meeting of January 24, 2012

Held at the Boyden Center, 1298 Cohannet Street, Taunton, MA

(Please mark your calendars: The next meeting of the Trail Committee will be held on Tuesday, February 28, at 10:00 am at the Boyden Center. Committee meetings are held on the fourth Tuesday of the month at 10:00 am at the Boyden Center.)

Present:

Scott MacFaden, Wildlands Trust
Michael Horrigan, Taunton Municipal Light Plant
Ronald Medeiros, Landowner
Shaun Provencher, MA Department of Conservation and Recreation
Jamie Fosburgh, National Park Service
Lee Steppacher, National Park Service
Priscilla Chapman, Mass Audubon
Roy Edwards, Taunton River canoe and kayak rentals
William Napolitano, Southeastern Regional Planning & Economic Development District
Don Sullivan, Southeastern Regional Planning & Economic Development District
Carolyn LaMarre, Taunton River Watershed Alliance
Alfred Lima, Taunton River Watershed Alliance

Main Points of Discussion:

Slade's Ferry Crossing study: This project is important to the goals of the Taunton River Trail because its study area includes the terminus of the trail at the Veteran's Bridge in Somerset. Don Sullivan of SRPEDD explained the study, whose area includes that part of Somerset in the vicinity of the old Brightman Street Bridge. The four main purposes of the study included (1) identify infrastructure improvements (sidewalks, etc.) needed in the project area; (2) identify a bikepath route at Routes 138 and Route 6 that would connect with the bikepath on the new Veterans' Bridge; (3) plan for a riverfront park of 8-10 acres on the Taunton River; and (4) plan for a mixed-use development on the 7 acres north of Route 6 remaining from the relocation of the bridge.

The bike path and river greenways proposals in the plan will complement the goals of the Taunton River Trail. The Slade's Ferry Crossing plan will serve as a fitting focus for the intersection of the Taunton River Trail and the Providence to Provincetown Bikeway.

Taunton River parcels in Somerset: Al Lima met with Somerset Town Administrator Dennis Luttrell on January 23rd to discuss the Taunton River Trail and how it could complement the town's planning efforts. Mr. Luttrell liked the concept and said that an owner of one of the long riverfront parcels on Riverside Avenue south of the Slade's Ferry Crossing project area had approached him about the Town purchasing the parcel. Scott MacFaden offered to follow up with this and another landowner on the river to discuss a possible conveyance to the Wildlands Trust.

DCR trail section: The role of Iron Horse in the development of the DCR section of the trail remains uncertain. Al is scheduling a meeting with DCR planning staff to determine what steps DCR will require to get the project initiated. Adam Recchia mentioned in a previous email that DCR is the agency to file the paperwork with DOT to seek Enhancement funds for the project.

TMLP trail section: Bill Napolitano said that the TMLP section of the rail trail will need to be put in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), beginning with a pre-application to SRPEDD. Adam mentioned that the application would need to come from the City of Taunton. He noted that three forms would need to be submitted by the City: (1) an Enhancements application to SRPEDD; (2) a Project Needs Form to Mass DOT; and (3) a Project Initiation Form to Mass DOT.

Mike Horrigan suggested that we start with Kevin Shea, executive director of the Taunton Office of Economic and Community Development. Mike also reiterated that the rail trail cannot be placed on TMLP's Cleary property, where the light plant is located, but will need to detour around the site on Route 138.

National Park Service Cost Share Program grant application: Lee Steppacher mentioned that this round of the program emphasized "water trails." Discussion ensued on what that would mean for the Sweet's Knoll site. Possibilities included a river access site on the property, interpretive signage, and fishing and kayaking launch area. An interpretive map would be essential, as would an "app" for I-Phones. The grant requires a 50/50 match; Lee suggested that the match could come from the MA Public Access Board. Lee will prepare the application, which is due February 2nd. Letters of support were requested.

Al mentioned to what degree archaeological resources on the Sweet's Knoll site would be a deterrent to recreational use. Ron Medeiros said that the site had been graveled out years ago, taking out the archaeological artifacts on the site. He noted that a pier is the only significant historical artifact on the site and that a rock on the shore has a steel rod in it that was used to tie the nets for the herring run catch each Spring. Shaun Provencher said that there are on-line archaeological research documents from the 1950's that were prepared for the Sweet's Knoll site and the surrounding area.

Gateways Cities funding for the Quequechan River rail trail: The Massachusetts Gateway Cities Program has awarded \$785,000 to the City of Fall River to design and

permit the remaining portion of the Quequechan River Bike Path. That path will extend from the terminus of the existing path to downtown and to the waterfront. From there, it will continue along the Taunton River to the bike path that crosses the river on the Veteran's Bridge and will connect with the southern terminus of the Taunton River Trail.

NE Capital property: Sean said that the lawyers from DCR and the estate have been in contact about the disposition of this 27-acre property on the Taunton River at the southern terminus of the Sweet's Knoll site. At issue are real estate taxes in arrears to the town.

Subdivision parcel north of the TMLP property: Ron has spoken with the owner three times and been told that the property is not really for sale. Ron approached him about leasing the land for a solar panel "farm," which would include a bikepath that would extend from Route 138 to the ROW, shortening the length of the bikepath that would need to be on the highway. The solar lease would be for 20 years. If the subdivision plan is implemented and house lots created on the subdivision road (Sandpiper Way), there exists a water easement to the Town of Dighton on an end lot on the cul-de-sac that could possibly provide access from the subdivision road to the DCR ROW.

DOT ROW segment: Al contacted Chalita Belfield, Manager of Railroad Properties for the DOT to determine the status of the railroad ROW north of the TMLP ROW to the Weir junction. Her mapping showed the line at that location as abandoned, but she will need to check further with other DOT staff to determine the status of the ROW and will get back to Al. She suggested that we work with DOT's bike path representative. She volunteered the information that DOT would not be in favor of a bike path running parallel to a commuter rail line.

Pine family ROW: Al contacted the Solomon Pine to discuss the Taunton River Trail and the Pine ownership of part of the ROW north of the DCR ROW. He agreed to host a future walk on his property. Shaun said that the DCR Lands Committee would probably not be interested in the Pine parcel if access through the Aquaria ROW was not possible. Without access through the Aquaria land to the TMLP ROW, the Pine parcel would be a dead end. In that case, DCR could probably access Sandpiper Way through the water easement to Route 138.

Greenways along the Taunton and its tributaries: Meetings will be scheduled with Taunton and Dighton officials to discuss the rail trail and the greenways concepts.

A connection to Newport: Not much to report, except that there is growing interest on Aquidneck Island for a bikepath along the old rail line that once connected Newport and Fall River. More on this later.

Follow-up tasks:

Al will contact the owners of property between the Taunton River and Riverside Avenue in Somerset south of the old Brightman Street Bridge to open a dialogue on a bike path easement on their property and possible sales to implement the greenway concept. Scott MacFaden will follow up with these owners to explore their interest in conveying a fee or less-than-fee interest to the Wildlands Trust.

Al will schedule a meeting with DCR planning staff and members of the committee in Boston to acquaint the planning staff with the Taunton River Trail concept and to determine in what direction DCR would prefer to go with their part of the project.

Al will contact Kevin Shea in Taunton to open a dialogue on the rail trail project. He will also meet with the Dighton Community Preservation Committee on February 27 to discuss Dighton's role in the trail and greenway projects.

Carolyn LaMarre will obtain the Aquaria ROW drawings and bring them to the February 28th meeting of the committee.

Lee Steppacher will prepare and submit an application to the National Park Service's Cost Share Program for various improvements to Sweet's Knoll and related educational materials, as described above.

Ron will continue to negotiate with the owner of the Sandpiper Way subdivision related to a solar farm and a bikepath on his property.

Al will contact Alfredo Andrade at Aquaria to continue a dialogue related to access across their ROW.

Al will contact the DOT bikeways planner related to the DOT segment of the ROW.