

Cochituate Rail Trail Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
January 11, 2016, 6:30 PM
Concord Room, Hampton Inn

Present: Janice Henderson, Chair; Dave Camacho, Vice Chair; Will Schoenig, Clerk; Peter Henry, Josh Ostroff, John Magee, Richard Cugini, Eric Jones

Also present: Geoff Lewis, Senior Planner; Bill McGrath and Kien Ho, BETA

The meeting was called to order at 6:37 PM by Jan Henderson, Chair.

1. Introductions

Members were introduced, including Geoff Lewis, the new Senior Planner in the Community and Economic Development Department.

2. Public comment

James Sheridan, representing the Disabled Veterans indicated they are looking to collaborate with the rail trail during design. It was noted that his and other organizations alongside the trail are invited to attend the MassDOT 25% design hearings.

3. Acquisition update

Josh Ostroff described the status of acquisition. The Town recently signed a Purchase and Sale agreement with CSX for \$6.345 million. This price was based on a recently joint appraisal using the CSX “over the fence” methodology.

The P&S does not include the “Wonderbread Spur” which will be conveyed at no cost.

While appearing expensive this is an appropriate price for Natick based on various factors such as location and previous rail trail agreements; it is the price at which CSX will sell the property, even if the Town wants to pay less.

Funding for the purchase is expected to come from multiple sources; primarily:

- Funding request to town meeting on Spring warrant for approximately \$2 - \$2.5MM using funds for land acquisition
- A state appropriation, including \$3 million from the 2014 Transportation Bond Bill that has been requested by the Town, our legislative delegation, the Town of Framingham and businesses along the trail.
- Private fundraising. The new Friends of Natick Trails non-profit will be requesting donations from businesses and individuals. They will be meeting after the CRT meeting for people interested in participating.

The sale is contingent on the Town raising the funds and on environmental testing. We will also need to resolve various easements to satisfy MassDOT.

Public comments were entertained at this point.

Jerry Burke asked what the private demand might be for the property, and if this might inform the purchase price. Mr. Ostroff explained that if the Town didn't buy it, the property would likely be sold off to abutters who might have an incentive to use the additional square footage to increase their density through increased Floor Area Ratio (FAR).

Julian Munnich asked about private demand / alternate use of the CSX land as it pertains to the appraisal, and whether the appraisal was a public document.

In reply, Mr. Ostroff described the methodology and would ask Town Counsel to determine whether and when the appraisal was a public record.

A. Richard Miller stated the he had been a member of the committee but was no longer, thanks to Mr. Ostroff. He also stated that the price was far too high, and that we should take it by eminent domain and that we should not pay more than several hundred thousand dollars. Framingham's acquisition of their section was cited as a comparison.

In reply, Mr. Ostroff stated that it was the Town's understanding that the line was exempt from eminent domain proceedings; the comparison with Framingham was not valid because the state did not have the same profit incentive that CSX did.

Bob Caplin asked for clarification on funding sources, which were reviewed.

Cathy Coughlin asked about funding to build the trail.

In reply, Mr. Ostroff explained that the construction was scheduled for Federal Fiscal Year 2018 and the estimated cost of \$6 million was to be funded by the federal government and the state. The project qualified for CMAQ, or Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funding, and which was voted by the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization, or MPO.

4. Design update

Bill McGrath (BETA group) provided a presentation of the 25% design as it currently stands. It was submitted in 2014, but has had revision and comment since then, most recently with a need for additional survey work at the Route 9 and Route 30 bridges, and for further discussion with the MBTA, MassDOT and the Town about the connection to Natick Center at the southern end of the trail.

Following the presentation the following was noted by the committee and/or BETA:

- The town of Natick may request a cooperative agreement with Framingham as part of the bridge across route 30 is on Framingham property.
- Funding for the design of the rail trail has already been approved via town meeting
- BETA obtained design funding for the Route 9 bridge from MassDOT.
- Construction oversight, estimated to be approximately \$54,000 will be funded by the Town at a future Town Meeting. In essence this would be a representative to maintain construction plans and act as "owner's rep" for the town.
- Right of ways are required to be secured by the town
- Environmental comments have not been received yet
- Some District 3 comments are still to be addressed including utility impacts
- Because this is a TIP funded project, the design to federal and MassDOT standards
- A very rigid review process must be completed.
- Milestones going forward include: MassDOT public hearing possibly in March, 75% and 100% design, advertising for construction in the fall of 2017 at the earliest and completion of construction fall of 2019 at the earliest.

Following committee discussion, the following public comments and questions were made.

Resident Bob Caplin raised the question: If residents ride their bike to the commuter rail, where do they park?

Mr. Ostroff noted that the MBTA station needs more bike parking even without the CRT. They are challenged by a limited amount of public land to utilize but it does need to be addressed as part of the CRT and station design.

Mr. Caplin also had a question concerning the Wonderbread spur at Speen Street: Should there be a grade separated crossing, such as a bridge or tunnel and more bike parking at the mall?

In reply, Joshua Ostroff noted that a bridge or tunnel was considered years ago when the Mall was expanding, but there was inadequate land, and the consensus was that with a signalized intersection at Nouvelle Way, it was less critical. The town does not own any land that could be used for a bridge or tunnel.

The upcoming MassDOT hearing will be an opportunity to bring these issues to the attention of the state as well.

Resident Pat Conaway wondered if there would there be space for bike rentals / kiosk?

Mr. Ostroff noted this would be a good opportunity for the private sector, not the Town.

Tom Branham, a member of the Framingham Rail Trail Committee offered the suggestion that an asymmetric design at crossings to improve bike safety and reduce congestion; it was suggested that the bridge design include solar panels to act as a roof and generate revenue.

A. Richard Miller stated:

- 14' trail width is preferable to 12'. Adding width after construction would be expensive.
- Unlawful entry to the State Park is an issue. An at-grade crosswalk at Route 30 would be needed to help alleviate the issue.
- An extended bridge at Home Depot would make access to the State Park difficult.
- Using white background signs, in winter weather would make them hard to read, yellow markings would be more legible. Porous pavement should be considered to eliminate ice issues.

Another resident echoed the comment that 14' is preferable, explaining that in Canada there are slow and fast lanes in either direction.

Mr. Munnich asked whether the grade of Route 30 was going to be changed at the bridge, because this affected clearance.

Mr. Munnich wondered if the original rail bed at the intersection may have a raised grade and recommended the design consider reducing the grade at the bridge if possible to reduce the height of the bridge.

Mr. Munnich also questioned the design of the trail width. Some Joggers may prefer jogging on grass instead of the trail itself which could be detrimental to the trail. He wondered if the design included methods to discourage running off the trail.

Mr. McGrath (BETA group) responded that the design is typically a 12' path with 2' of grass, 1' each side, and that alternate treatments can be looked into but the financial impact must be considered.

A resident asked if there was a way to see the CSX appraisal.

Mr. Ostroff replied that he must verify the appraisal is a public document and not private. He noted that an "across the fence" methodology was used.

Tom Branham (Framingham Rail Trail Committee) questioned Julian Munnich, regarding the intersection of Speen & Rte. 30 there have been lots of drainage issues, do you see issues if the grade is lowered?

Mr. Munnich responded that, working from memory, there are 3 grades and the intersection may need to be raised but the rail bed may be high in the intersection.

Resident Frank Sanchez questioned that since the path is multi-use, if someone were arriving by car where would they park?

Mr. Ostroff responded:

- The town has acquired $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre at Mechanic Street; it accommodates approximately 70 cars and will also be used for parking for Navy Yard Field.
- There is also some parking on Chrysler Road.
- The town has not identified additional parking but recognizes the need; however, with a trail of 4 miles there is limited demand for people to drive and park, as opposed to walk or ride to the trail.

A. Richard Miller questioned that if parking is provide, would water and toilet facilities be provided? If not already planned it should be included.

Would the design presentation be online? In reply, it was stated that it would be.

5. Construction

Mr. Ostroff explained that construction of the project will be federal- and state-funded with some town oversight. The Town was grateful for legislative, town staff and MPO support, including former Framingham Selectman, and regional representative to the MPO, Dennis Giombetti. It would likely take parts of two construction seasons and start in 2018.

6. Additional business

Jan Henderson, the Chair, stated that because of the time and the following meeting by the Friends of Natick Trails, administrative matters would be taken up at a future meeting. These included committee organization, meeting minutes, the web page and other issues.

Mr. Ostroff thanked the Hampton Inn for hosting the meeting, Natick Pegasus for recording it and all who attended.

On a motion by Mr. Camacho, seconded by Mr. Magee and unanimously voted, the meeting was adjourned at 8:19PM