

# **Ashuelot Rail Trail Plan Advisory Committee Meeting**

## **Minutes**

**October 17, 2019**

**Present:** Bruce Bohannon, *Swanzy Rail Trails Advisory Committee*; Chris Brehme, *Keene State College*; Mari Brunner, *City of Keene*; Mary Page, *Monadnock Happy Trails Association*; Mike Kowalczyk, *Swanzy Rail Trails Advisory Committee*; Tricia Zahn, *Cheshire Medical Center*.

Staff member present was Henry Underwood, *GIS Specialist/Planner*.

### **I. Welcome and Introductions**

The meeting began at 1:00 p.m. and introductions were made.

### **II. Minutes of August 29, 2019 Meeting**

Bruce Bohannon made a motion to accept the minutes. The motion was seconded by Tricia Zahn and passed by unanimous vote.

### **III. Project Updates**

Henry Underwood updated attendees on project activities that occurred since the August 29, 2019 meeting. The vision, goals, and objectives were refined based on feedback. Four additional work tasks were also completed and will be shared via e-mail following the meeting and made available via the project webpage:

1. An economic benefit memo includes research and findings related to the economic benefits of trails from: increased property values, consumer spending, employment, and other sources. It includes example methods that could be applied to the Ashuelot Rail Trail going forward to derive dollar values for some of these things.
2. A municipal survey memo presents the SWRPC method and responses from interviews with town and city staff or officials and covers information about improvements, promotion, land use issues, concerns, previous planning, and more.
3. A user group survey memo includes data collected from a handful of user groups like the Monadnock Cycling Club, Monadnock Happy Trails and Winchester Trail Riders about their activities, priorities for improvements, concerns, and more.
4. An intercept survey memo summarizes data collected from short conversations with trail users conducted by SWRPC and an Antioch graduate student as part of a service learning project. Surveys occurred in each of the four communities. Unlike anonymous counts or a desktop survey taken off the trail, intercept surveys are the ground truth of things like trip purpose in a given area and a way to engage people on specific issues or concerns.

#### IV. Draft Plan and Implementation Plan

Henry Underwood advised the group that staff has completed a draft Plan and the focus of the meeting is to review the document and provide input. This could include missing items as well as things to change or clarify. He said it was intentionally designed to be brief, in part to emphasize the vision, goals, objectives, and implementation steps. He reiterated three key points that also appeared in a memo to guide the conversation:

- The time period of the Plan is 10 years and includes both ongoing efforts and short-term goals. Therefore, progress towards a goal should be able to be observed and measured during that time.
- The audience of the Plan will include a wide variety of individuals and groups, including trail owners and managers, host municipalities, stakeholders representing trails and/or specific users, landowners, legislators, grantors/granting agencies, planners, and the general public.
- Improving the trail will always require coordination and collaboration from multiple parties. The Plan does not guarantee implementation funding, but offers ideas on funding sources.

Henry Underwood reviewed each section of the Plan. Attendees provided a number of comments and suggestions relative to the plan content, format and next steps:

- Information describing the Implementation Plan headings should be moved to the end of the section so readers can more quickly review projects.
- It would be beneficial to make the Implementation Plan available in an interactive format that allows for sorting and searching such as a spreadsheet or web map.
- The Performance Measures section could benefit from more baseline measures and a new measure to quantify the popularity of the trail with visitors to the area (such as the number of people visiting the trail from Vermont or Massachusetts).
- The Performance Measures section needs to be organized by topic or goal area. There would be benefit to moving content from this section to the Vision, Goals, and Objectives section.
- The Manual on Uniform Traffic Code Devices design guidelines for signage is only a partial solution because it is focused primarily on roads. The Bureau of Trails guidelines should be added as a resource for signage to be used along the trail.
- More work is needed to determine what group or groups should oversee implementation of the Plan. For example, a group focused solely on the Ashuelot Rail Trail may not sufficiently address goals that relate to desired connectivity with other trails. Coordination with existing groups (including snowmobile clubs) about their interest in a new Ashuelot Rail Trail group would be a good next step.
- Adding a resource or directory of various groups with their contact information would be a short term measure to facilitate coordination on implementation projects.
- SWRPC should consider an open house to promote the Plan and celebrate the conclusion of the project.

Attendees asked about how the Plan will be used once it is completed. Henry Underwood said it would become a resource to communities and others by providing important background information as well as a vetted listing of improvements. He said SWRPC would provide a direct notification to each community when the Plan is completed but it will be up to each community to help circulate the Plan within their community, including making it available via Town webpages and to municipal committees. Tricia Zahn suggested that Project Advisory Committee members are in a unique position to make sure the Plan is shared effectively.

## **V. Next Steps**

Attendees agreed to set a 1-week deadline for additional feedback from Project Advisory Committee members. Henry Underwood said that following this deadline, SWRPC would incorporate feedback and publicize a 30-day comment period via SWRPC newsletters, Facebook page and project website as well as notify interested parties via e-mail.

Mari Brunner asked if SWRPC would lead a similar effort in the future dedicated to a different rail trail. Henry Underwood said that once the Plan for Ashuelot Rail Trail pilot project concludes, staff will consider how it might approach other trails.

## **VI. Next Meeting**

Henry Underwood said that he would be in contact with Committee members for the purpose of scheduling a final meeting of the Project Advisory Committee in December.

## **VII. Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 2:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Henry Underwood  
GIS Specialist/Planner