

Appendix C

Project Advisory Committee Meeting

Agendas & Minutes



# Ashuelot Rail Trail Plan Advisory Committee Meeting

## Minutes

May 3, 2018

**Present:** Larry Antonuk, *Swanzy Rail Trails Advisory Committee*; Bruce Bohannon, *Swanzy Rail Trails Advisory Committee*; Chris Brehme, *Keene State College*; James Duffy, *Pathways for Keene*; Chris Gamache, *New Hampshire Bureau of Trails*; James Holcomb, *Transport NH*; Mike Kowalczyk, *Swanzy Rail Trails Advisory Committee*; Rowland Russell, *Antioch University New England*; Margaret Sharra, *Town of Winchester*; Will Schoefmann, *City of Keene*; Barbara Skuly, *Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee*; Tricia Wadleigh, *Cheshire Medical Center*.

Staff members present were Henry Underwood, *GIS Specialist/Planner* and J.B. Mack, *Principal Planner*.

### I. Welcome and Introductions

Henry Underwood started the meeting at 10:05 a.m. and gave an introduction to the Plan for Ashuelot Rail Trail: A Pilot Project. He explained that the Ashuelot Rail Trail (ART), as defined by this planning effort, extends from the ART's intersection at the Center at Keene in downtown Keene to the trail's intersection with NH 63 in Hinsdale. He noted that this planning effort is a pilot project, because it will focus on the ART and will hopefully inform future rail trail planning efforts in the Monadnock Region.

Attendees were asked to introduce themselves, state their affiliation and answer at least one of the following:

1. Based on your affiliation, what are your interests related to the Ashuelot Rail Trail?
2. What are your thoughts and observations about the trail today and in the future?

Will Schoefmann stated that he was interested in the ART because the City of Keene is at the end or middle of the trail, depending on where you are starting a trail trip. He said he wants to get more people using the trail because it is important to the City's economic vitality. Chris Brehme said that one thing he likes about this area is that there is a good active trail network, and the trails provide an excellent way to connect to regional service hubs. He noted that he has worked with Keene State College students on a capstone project that looked at the conditions of the ART as well as opportunities for promoting tourism with rail trails. Jim Duffy said that Pathways for Keene has always been very interested in upgrading and expanding the rail trail system. He said that growing collaboration outside of Keene would be helpful, and because the rail trails are well built, they wouldn't be too difficult to expand. He noted that he was also interested in finding ways for people with limited economic means to use the trail as a less expensive form of transportation.

Margaret Sharra said that the trail from Hinsdale to Keene is a great recreational draw. She's ridden horses and snowmobiles on the ART and she asked why the study area stops at Rt. 63 in Hinsdale. Henry Underwood responded that from his understanding, this is where public access ends. Margaret Sharra noted she goes fishing off the ART and it has beautiful views.

Rowland Russell said that he is interested in the intersection of the environment, arts and history and believes rail trails are an example of where these themes intersect. He noted that he is also affiliated with the Friends of Public Art and the Historical Society of Cheshire County, both of which are interested in transportation. He noted that he collects old maps and has some of the ART. James Holcomb said that he is looking forward to exploring the ART as a commuting resource as well as learning more about other ideas for the ART. Tricia Wadleigh said that she is attending the meetings to look at the health side of things - getting people to use the trail to improve public health. She also thinks that the rail trails offer an opportunity to improve community social interaction. Bruce Bohannon stated that he has a long history with rail trails in Swanzey. He noted he lives adjacent to the ART and has worked on several projects improving the rail trails and bridges. He added that he has worked with Keene and Swanzey on a Transportation Alternatives Program project that improved part of the ART. Chris Gamache stated that he represents the trail landowner, the State of New Hampshire and he noted that at the Trails Bureau, they manage the trail as a recreational resource. Barbara Skuly stated that a good deal of the ART parallels the Ashuelot River and she is interested in looking at connections between the trail and the river. She mentioned that long ago she was part of something called the Ashuelot Rails to Trails Coalition, before the State purchased the ART. Mike Kowalczyk said that as the Chair of the Swanzey Rail Trails Advisory Committee, his objective is to maintain the ART and Cheshire Rail Trail. Larry Anotuk said that although he lives in Marlborough, he is also interested in the ART. He said that there are interesting historical artifacts associated with the rail trails in the area and he wants to live in a place that has great bike access. Rowland Russell mentioned that he also coordinates trail cleanups for Cheshire and ART and has an interest making interpretive signage available on the trail.

Henry Underwood noted that there are other stakeholders that have expressed interest but were not able to attend today's meeting, including Alan Rumrill from the Historical Society of Cheshire County, Herb Stephens from the Town of Winchester, Mike Darcy and Wayne Gallagher from the Town of Hinsdale, Sarah Bomba from the Pisgah Mountain Trail Riders, Chuck Redfern from the NH Rail Trails Coalition, Rick Brackett from the Monadnock Conservancy, and Drew Bryenton from the Monadnock Cycling Club. He stated that he has also reached out to neighboring RPCs in Massachusetts and Vermont to coordinate their potential participation.

## **II. Project Background**

Henry Underwood gave a presentation providing background on the project. A copy of that presentation is attached to the minutes.

Henry Underwood requested clarification regarding the use of all terrain vehicles (ATVs) on state owned rail trails in the winter and Chris Gamache responded that ATV's are not allowed on the ART at any time.

## **III. Project Scope and Timeline**

Henry Underwood continued with the presentation that provided information about the project scope and timeline. See the attached copy of the presentation for more details.

### **Online Questionnaire**

Henry Underwood noted that public involvement and input is a large part of the Plan for the ART project, and that SWRPC has developed a draft online survey to solicit feedback from the general public. He noted that the survey is based on review of other trail user surveys and explained that the goal is to keep the survey short in order to promote participation. Committee members reviewed and discussed potential changes to the draft survey:

- Barbara Skuly asked if question #4 was needed and Bruce Bohannon suggested it be taken out.
- Chris Gamache questioned whether question #5 was needed. Barbara Skuly said that perhaps #5 could say “Is the community doing enough to maintain its bike/ped infrastructure?” Rowland Russell suggested encouraging people to answer this kind of question in question #12. Margaret Sharra said that the question should be specific to the rail trail and should be after question #10.
- Mike Kowalczyk asked if there was any value in targeting businesses to participate in the survey? He noted that a realtor contacted him who was selling property along one of Swanzey’s rail trails and she wanted to know the status of any trail improvements as a way to market the property. Henry Underwood responded that perhaps the project could partner with the Greater Keene Chamber of Commerce to do a survey.
- Mike Kowalczyk said that the survey doesn’t really address family use of the trail.
- Chris Gamache said that the survey should be broad enough to inform future recreational or transportation improvements to the trail, so that it can be eligible for future Bureau of Trails, NH Department of Transportation grant opportunities.
- Barbara Skuly suggested that it would be good to have the survey identify whether the respondent is an abutter to the trail, and if they have any feedback about the trail. They may be sensitive to impacts like litter, noise, etc. She said that she was involved in doing a survey in the early 1990s prior to the State purchasing the trails, and there were some property owners that were concerned, but perhaps that has changed now.
- Margaret Sharra noted that the survey appears to focus on existing users, but what about future users? She stated that it would be helpful to know that if the towns were to improve the trail, would that make a survey respondent more likely to use the trail even if they aren’t using it today? Chris Brehme suggested that this could possibly be addressed through question #11.
- Bruce Bohannon noted that the survey doesn’t identify types of users, only types of trips. He suggested there might be a question #9b that would differentiate between types of users such as snowmobilers, horseback riders, walkers, bicyclists, etc.

Henry Underwood thanked the Committee for their initial thoughts and encouraged them to take it home with them and send any additional feedback. He said he would appreciate responses within one week with any feedback on the survey.

#### **IV. Discussion**

Henry Underwood opened a discussion about the project and provided the Committee with the following question prompts:

1. Why is this project important to you?
2. What are your goals for this project?
3. How can this project and its outcomes be most useful?
4. Are there specific issues or opportunities you would like to share?

The following observations were made by Committee members:

- Mike Kowalczyk asked if Cheshire County should be involved. He also asked why this was a pilot project. Henry Underwood responded that the project is a pilot project because this is SWRPC’s initial attempt in developing a rail trail plan and the ART was selected due to the amount of on-going momentum. He stated that this planning process should help inform other future rail trail planning projects in the region. He confirmed that Cheshire County did not currently have a formal

role as part of the project, it would be a good step to let them know what work was being undertaken.

- Margaret Sharra asked Henry Underwood to share the presentation with her so she can share it with the Winchester Board of Selectmen.
- Rowland Russell asked if this would be linked at all with the Ecovation Hub activities happening between Cheshire County, Windham County, Vermont and Franklin County, Massachusetts. He explained that there might be some funding opportunities associated with that effort that could benefit this project. Henry Underwood responded that SWRPC is involved with the regional planning commissions from those areas and are discussing transportation planning collaboration opportunities. He noted he's invited the regional planning commissions to be involved in this process.
- Will Schoefmann said that his goal is to build relationships with other stakeholders and build a coalition so that we have stronger regional rail trails.
- Chris Brehme stated that the Keene State College students are a huge potential user base for this trail and the College has a responsibility to embrace this trail. Over 3,000 students can use and enjoy this trail.
- Rowland Russell discussed his fundraising idea for the trail to have a "railway relay half marathon" event and it would encourage carsharing as well.
- Barbara Skuly asked how this project will get publicized? Henry Underwood indicated that methods will include press releases, a project website and an open house. J. B. Mack added that we would be asking the Towns to provide information about the project on their websites, in town newsletters and possibly in their libraries. Margaret Sharra said that the Town of Winchester could include information about the project (including the survey) as part of their tax bills which are sent out during the last week of May. Rowland Russell said that surveys could be handed out at Board of Selectmen meetings and could be laminated and posted at trail heads with a weblink to the survey. Chris Gamache said that he has mailing lists of snowmobile clubs, trail riding clubs and others that could be used to get the word out.
- Bruce Bohannon asked about the maps at the back of the room. Henry Underwood responded that he created maps and if people have time they can draw on the maps to show challenges and opportunities associated with the trails. Chris Gamache said knowing about encroachments would be helpful.

## **V. Next Meeting**

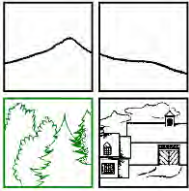
Henry Underwood asked if Whitcomb Hall was a good venue and everyone agreed that it was. He said that he would be in contact with Committee members for the purpose of scheduling the next meeting.

## **VI. Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 11:30 a.m. Several people stayed at Whitcomb Hall to look at ART maps and provide initial feedback on challenges and opportunities.

Respectfully submitted,

J. B. Mack  
Principal Planner



**Southwest Region Planning Commission**  
37 Ashuelot Street      Keene, NH 03431      603-357-0557      Fax 357-7440

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

**September 13, 2018  
10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.**

**Whitcomb Hall  
17 Main Street  
Swanzy, NH 03446**

## **Agenda**

- I. Welcome & Introductions
- II. Minutes of May 3, 2018 Meeting
- III. Project Background
- IV. Project Updates & Discussion
  - a. Literature Review
  - b. Base Mapping
  - c. Programs Analysis
  - d. Collisions Analysis
  - e. Bicycle and Pedestrian Counting Activities
  - f. Preliminary Results of Online Survey
  - g. Condition Assessment
- V. Next Steps
- VI. Next Meeting
- VII. Adjourn

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

## **Minutes**

**September 13, 2018**

**Present:** Larry Antonuk, *Swanzey Rail Trails Advisory Committee*; Bruce Bohannon, *Swanzey Rail Trails Advisory Committee*; Rick Brackett, *Monadnock Conservancy*; Chris Collins, *Antioch University New England*; Beth Giannini, *Franklin Region Council of Governments*; Christine Hadlow, *Greater Keene Chamber of Commerce*; Mike Kowalczyk, *Swanzey Rail Trails Advisory Committee*; Alan Rumrill, *Historic Society of Cheshire County*; Rowland Russell, *Antioch University New England*; Will Schoefmann, *City of Keene*; Margaret Sharra, *Town of Winchester*; Barbara Skuly, *Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee*; Herb Stephens, *Town of Winchester*; Tricia Wadleigh, *Cheshire Medical Center*.

Staff members present were Todd Horner, *Planner* and Henry Underwood, *GIS Specialist/Planner*.

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

The meeting began at 10:00 a.m. and introductions were made.

### **II. Minutes of May 3, 2018**

Rowland Russell pointed out that his name was correctly spelled on the sign-in sheet but not on the minutes. Will Schoefmann made a motion to accept the minutes with the change mentioned by Rowland Russell. The motion was seconded by Margaret Sharra and passed by unanimous vote.

### **III. Project Background**

Along with a PowerPoint slide show, Henry Underwood provided a recap of the focus of the first meeting, including the four major works tasks of the project. Project meetings include the 4-5 meetings of the Advisory Committee over a one-year period. An Existing Conditions Assessment of the trail includes subtasks primarily taken on by SWRPC staff that will be reviewed today. Public Outreach components include the currently-available online survey, reviewed at the first meeting as well as an Open House event to be held later in the fall. The Needs Analysis component involves a review of the information collected through the Existing Conditions Assessment, Public Outreach, and developing a plan, including specific projects for consideration. He said that today's focus involves updates and discussion on various tasks that make up the Existing Conditions Assessment. Specifically, SWRPC is requesting advice and guidance as well as help with identifying and addressing gaps in information that stakeholders around the table may be able to assist with.

### **IV. Project Updates & Discussion**

Henry Underwood explained that for each task, staff would explain why the task was included, what was done so far, if there are planned follow-ups in addition to what is presented, and where specifically staff



need input. Since there will only be a few minutes for each topic, He said that a supplemental sheet provided in the packet may be used to write in comments and feedback. He reminded participants that information and comments are always welcome outside of a meeting.

#### **a. Literature Review**

Todd Horner provided attendees a summary list of the documents collected as part of a literature review related to the project entitled “Plan for Ashuelot Rail Trail – Literature Review Summary Sheet.” He reminded attendees that a plan specifically for a section of rail trail is a new initiative. The purpose of this task is to collect information from other plans and documents that speak directly to the trail when it comes to management and development. He said these include state agencies, municipalities, and various user groups, among others. A review will allow the plan to better identify the extent there are opportunities to connect or intertwine various efforts to improve the trail. Todd Horner provided a summary of files, including agreements, cooperative agreements, planning documents, administrative rules, and other content. He highlighted the fact that each community along the trail has adopted to Complete Streets policies, which shows a commitment and opportunity to think about how the trail ties together this network of safe pathways for people walking and biking. He said between now and the next meeting, a detailed memo will be provided to document additional information about each source. Todd Horner added that he anticipates that additional documents will be identified as part of outreach activities tied to the project, such interviews or surveys targeting the four municipalities. He prompted attendees with discussion questions relative to the task and handout:

- Are there plans, laws, reports, or policies that we’ve missed?
- Are there particular documents that you are especially interested in hearing more about?

Rowland Russell suggested historical documents as an important source of information, including an inventory of assets located in the Antioch Library. He also suggested available natural resources inventories. Tricia Wadleigh asked if plans that show alignment would be helpful, and suggested the [State Health Improvement Plan](#), [Greater Monadnock Public Health Region Community Health Improvement Plan](#), and [Cheshire Medical Center Community Health Needs Assessment](#) as additional sources due to their emphasis on physical activity, recreational opportunities, and active transportation.

#### **b. Base Mapping**

Henry Underwood explained that this activity is focused on utilizing map data, including mainly digital information, also known as GIS (Geographic Information Systems) data to make a basic map to inform the project, staff, and anyone considering trail improvements. He said rail bridges and information from the town-specific map posters marked up at the first meeting would be identified in a future version. Henry Underwood prompted attendees with two discussion questions relative to the task and printed “strip map”:

- Are corrections needed?
- What would help your community or stakeholders understand the trail or your relationship to the trail?

Mike Kowalczyk said it would be helpful if the map could identify where people could get on and off the trail, both current locations and what would be proposed. Henry Underwood commented that staff hope to add the locations of Bureau of Trails gates, which should be helpful for this purpose. Mike Kowalczyk

noted that areas where parking was available would be helpful, as would bike-specific access points. Bruce Bohannon commented that the current data does not reflect Swanzey street name changes related to E911 addressing. Rowland Russell suggested adding a theme of “amenities” like bike repair shops, bathrooms, biking trails, hiking trails, and other assets near the trail. Rick Brackett suggested adding recreational uses like ballfields and the State’s Conservation Lands layer. Beth Giannini suggested adding information from the Tri-State Scenic Bikeway map, including designated routes, signs, and points of interest. Henry Underwood commented that he was also working to obtain information on snowmobile trails (beyond the rail trail itself). Mike Kowalcyzk suggested including historical assets, especially railroad-specific ones like depots, mile markers, and signal towers. Henry Underwood said SWRPC was limited in its ability to collect new data so for each theme it would be beneficial to locate sources where the information discussed has already been digitized.

### **c. Programs Analysis**

Todd Horner said that as part of the project, SWRPC is conducting fairly straightforward research to primarily understand what specific events or programs made use of the trail, and to some extent start to identify potential ideas for future events and programs. So far, SWRPC staff have reached out by phone and e-mail to municipalities, user groups and others. There are some large events that utilize the trail such as the recent half marathon in Swanzey ([Elija’s Race](#)). Schools utilize the trail for cross country training and outdoor education. The Monadnock Cycling Club and equestrian clubs utilize the trail for organized rides. Organized programming in other areas have included Safe Routes to School “walking buses,” breakfast on the trail during National Bike Month, birding, tourism excursions and more. Todd Horner prompted attendees with two discussion questions relative to the task:

- Are there current programs on the rail trail that the committee would like to bring to our attention?
- Are there events or programs that have occurred on other rail trails that the committee thinks could enhance programming on the Ashuelot Rail Trail?

He asked attendees to share programming they are aware of relative to the trail, or going on outside of the area. Alan Rumrill said he has done historic hikes in Harrisville, Hancock, and Keene but not on this trail. The hikes have featured information about the loss of passenger service and other implications of the closure of the railroads. Rowland Russell brought up the idea of a “railway relay” as an end-to-end run. Tricia Wadleigh commented that there is an ultramarathon event in Brookline and Milford called the Ghost Train Rail Race. Rick Brackett added that the [Source to Sea Cleanup](#) is using the rail trail as access points to accomplish their work. Mike Kowalcyzk mentioned Path Less Pedaled, an organization that markets bicycle tourism as an organization to look to for ideas.

### **d. Collisions Analysis**

Henry Underwood said looking at safety of the trail was a key data collection aspect of the project, specifically at the trail’s intersections with public and private roads. Speeding, visibility, and crossing distances are common concerns. To learn about any incidents at these locations, SWRPC reviewed data from the NH Department of Safety relative to motor vehicle crashes at 27 trail/road crossings. Henry Underwood emphasized that this represents a historical look at incidents, over a 10-year period starting from the most current complete year of data. He said that a provided technical memo would communicate the findings and limitations of the dataset. Henry Underwood prompted attendees with two discussion questions relative to this task:

- What other sources of data could be considered to obtain information relevant to safety?
- What safety concerns are you hearing about from your community, stakeholders, etc.?

Todd Horner commented that looking at incidents in the general area of a trail crossing is important because often, these areas and intersections are what connect someone's home, work, or other trip origin to the trail. Herb Stephens expressed an interest in learning about the accidents happening outside of the intersections, directly on the trails (including bicycle crashes, becoming lost while using the trail, or other injuries sustained on the trail). Bruce Bohannon added that NH Fish & Game becomes involved if the incident is located on the trail itself. Rowland Russell commented that anecdotally he has heard of a number of assaults. Police data on homeless encampments and sexual assaults may be another source of information to inform safety concerns and improvements. Mike Kowalczyk recognized the need for information about incidents involving all-terrain vehicles. Of the safety concerns he hears, this is one of the most common.

#### **e. Bicycle and Pedestrian Counting Activities**

Henry Underwood explained that SWRPC has conducted both automated and manual counts of people biking and walking on the trail at 9 locations. The activity will also involve looking back at previous counts of people riding bikes. Rick Brackett commented that the Monadnock Conservancy has access to a trail counter that is not currently being used. A two-page handout provided a map of the count locations as well as a preview of summarized data for the location in Keene north of Winchester Street. Margaret Sharra asked about the influence of not just population, but trail condition on the number of users in a given area. Henry Underwood prompted attendees with two discussion questions relative to this task:

- Do you feel there are gaps in the distribution of counts that we should be aware of?
- Should SWRPC consider conducting wintertime counts? Where?

Attendees spoke in favor of continuing counts on the trail, including permanent counts.

#### **f. Preliminary Results of Online Survey**

Todd Horner provided a recap of the questions that appear in the survey and how it has been distributed (including via press release, e-mail lists, and webpages). He said the goal today is to talk about who we have reached so far and to target groups we have not yet heard from. Todd shared a map of home zip code responses, many of which were throughout the State, as well as Vermont and Massachusetts. He commented that it does suggest there is regional interest. He also pointed out that the survey could benefit from more college age respondents as well as those over 75. Todd pointed out that based on the trail uses indicated so far, it does not appear that snowmobile clubs have been reached at this point in the project. The survey does not have a defined close date and will be open through the winter. Todd Horner prompted attendees with two discussion questions relative to this task:

- Any feedback on the survey? Ease of use? Question content?
- Any suggestions on future survey outreach?

Margaret Sharra observed that there is no question about whether or not someone would use the trail more if improvements were made. Rowland Russell suggested running some of the ideas about marketing by people who indicated they had not used the trail before to gauge their receptivity. He suggested utilizing

social media to the extent possible. Todd Horner said SWRPC can help by providing “canned” content. Henry Underwood also encouraged organizations with social media accounts to create their own “pitch.”

#### **g. Condition Assessment**

Henry Underwood summarized information from the Keene State College Geography Department project – The Ashuelot Rail-Trail: The ART of Commuting. As part of the project, a “rideability assessment” was conducted based on surface material, texture and moisture. He added that SWRPC is currently working with the Keene State College Geography Department to convert the report data into a format more suitable for mapping and analysis. Bruce Bohannon suggested that an update on trail conditions would be beneficial.

#### **V. Next Meeting**

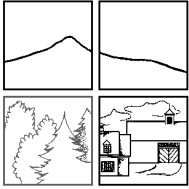
Henry Underwood said that he would be in contact with Committee members for the purpose of scheduling the next meeting.

#### **VI. Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 11:30 a.m. Several people stayed at Whitcomb Hall to look at Ashuelot Rail Trail maps and provide initial feedback on challenges and opportunities.

Respectfully submitted,

Henry Underwood  
GIS Specialist/Planner



***Southwest Region Planning Commission***  
37 Ashuelot Street      Keene, NH 03431      603-357-0557      Fax 357-7440

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

**August 29, 2019  
3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.**

**Whitcomb Hall  
17 Main Street  
Swanzey, NH 03446**

## **Agenda**

- I. Welcome & Introductions
- II. Minutes of September 13, 2018 Meeting
- III. Project Updates
- IV. Draft Vision, Goals and Objectives
- V. Next Steps
- VI. Next Meeting
- VII. Adjourn

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### **c. Programs Analysis**

Todd Horner said that as part of the project, SWRPC is conducting fairly straightforward research to primarily understand what specific events or programs made use of the trail, and to some extent start to identify potential ideas for future events and programs. So far, SWRPC staff have reached out by phone and e-mail to municipalities, user groups and others. There are some large events that utilize the trail such as the recent half marathon in Swanzey ([Elija’s Race](#)). Schools utilize the trail for cross country training and outdoor education. The Monadnock Cycling Club and equestrian clubs utilize the trail for organized rides. Organized programming in other areas have included Safe Routes to School “walking buses,” breakfast on the trail during National Bike Month, birding, tourism excursions and more. Todd Horner prompted attendees with two discussion questions relative to the task:

- Are there current programs on the rail trail that the committee would like to bring to our attention?
- Are there events or programs that have occurred on other rail trails that the committee thinks could enhance programming on the Ashuelot Rail Trail?

He asked attendees to share programming they are aware of relative to the trail, or going on outside of the area. Alan Rumrill said he has done historic hikes in Harrisville, Hancock, and Keene but not on this trail. The hikes have featured information about the loss of passenger service and other implications of the closure of the railroads. Rowland Russell brought up the idea of a “railway relay” as an end-to-end run. Tricia Wadleigh commented that there is an ultramarathon event in Brookline and Milford called the Ghost Train Rail Race. Rick Brackett added that the [Source to Sea Cleanup](#) is using the rail trail as access points to accomplish their work. Mike Kowalcyzk mentioned Path Less Pedaled, an organization that markets bicycle tourism as an organization to look to for ideas.

### **d. Collisions Analysis**

Henry Underwood said looking at safety of the trail was a key data collection aspect of the project, specifically at the trail’s intersections with public and private roads. Speeding, visibility, and crossing distances are common concerns. To learn about any incidents at these locations, SWRPC reviewed data from the NH Department of Safety relative to motor vehicle crashes at 27 trail/road crossings. Henry Underwood emphasized that this represents a historical look at incidents, over a 10-year period starting from the most current complete year of data. He said that a provided technical memo would communicate the findings and limitations of the dataset. Henry Underwood prompted attendees with two discussion questions relative to this task:



- What other sources of data could be considered to obtain information relevant to safety?
- What safety concerns are you hearing about from your community, stakeholders, etc.?

Todd Horner commented that looking at incidents in the general area of a trail crossing is important because often, these areas and intersections are what connect someone's home, work, or other trip origin to the trail. Herb Stephens expressed an interest in learning about the accidents happening outside of the intersections, directly on the trails (including bicycle crashes, becoming lost while using the trail, or other injuries sustained on the trail). Bruce Bohannon added that NH Fish & Game becomes involved if the incident is located on the trail itself. Rowland Russell commented that anecdotally he has heard of a number of assaults. Police data on homeless encampments and sexual assaults may be another source of information to inform safety concerns and improvements. Mike Kowalczyk recognized the need for information about incidents involving all-terrain vehicles. Of the safety concerns he hears, this is one of the most common.

#### **e. Bicycle and Pedestrian Counting Activities**

Henry Underwood explained that SWRPC has conducted both automated and manual counts of people biking and walking on the trail at 9 locations. The activity will also involve looking back at previous counts of people riding bikes. Rick Brackett commented that the Monadnock Conservancy has access to a trail counter that is not currently being used. A two-page handout provided a map of the count locations as well as a preview of summarized data for the location in Keene north of Winchester Street. Margaret Sharra asked about the influence of not just population, but trail condition on the number of users in a given area. Henry Underwood prompted attendees with two discussion questions relative to this task:

- Do you feel there are gaps in the distribution of counts that we should be aware of?
- Should SWRPC consider conducting wintertime counts? Where?

Attendees spoke in favor of continuing counts on the trail, including permanent counts.

#### **f. Preliminary Results of Online Survey**

Todd Horner provided a recap of the questions that appear in the survey and how it has been distributed (including via press release, e-mail lists, and webpages). He said the goal today is to talk about who we have reached so far and to target groups we have not yet heard from. Todd shared a map of home zip code responses, many of which were throughout the State, as well as Vermont and Massachusetts. He commented that it does suggest there is regional interest. He also pointed out that the survey could benefit from more college age respondents as well as those over 75. Todd pointed out that based on the trail uses indicated so far, it does not appear that snowmobile clubs have been reached at this point in the project. The survey does not have a defined close date and will be open through the winter. Todd Horner prompted attendees with two discussion questions relative to this task:

- Any feedback on the survey? Ease of use? Question content?
- Any suggestions on future survey outreach?

Margaret Sharra observed that there is no question about whether or not someone would use the trail more if improvements were made. Rowland Russell suggested running some of the ideas about marketing by people who indicated they had not used the trail before to gauge their receptivity. He suggested utilizing

social media to the extent possible. Todd Horner said SWRPC can help by providing “canned” content. Henry Underwood also encouraged organizations with social media accounts to create their own “pitch.”

**g. Condition Assessment**

Henry Underwood summarized information from the Keene State College Geography Department project – The Ashuelot Rail-Trail: The ART of Commuting. As part of the project, a “rideability assessment” was conducted based on surface material, texture and moisture. He added that SWRPC is currently working with the Keene State College Geography Department to convert the report data into a format more suitable for mapping and analysis. Bruce Bohannon suggested that an update on trail conditions would be beneficial.

**V. Next Meeting**

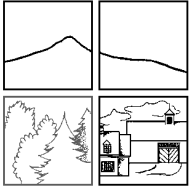
Henry Underwood said that he would be in contact with Committee members for the purpose of scheduling the next meeting.

**VI. Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 11:30 a.m. Several people stayed at Whitcomb Hall to look at Ashuelot Rail Trail maps and provide initial feedback on challenges and opportunities.

Respectfully submitted,

Henry Underwood  
GIS Specialist/Planner



***Southwest Region Planning Commission***  
37 Ashuelot Street                      Keene, NH 03431                      603-357-0557                      Fax 357-7440

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**DATE:**                      August 22, 2019  
**TO:**                              Plan for Ashuelot Rail Trail Project Advisory Committee  
**FROM:**                      SWRPC Staff  
**RE:**                              Plan Development – Draft Vision, Goals, and Objectives

The Plan for Ashuelot Rail Trail project aims to develop a common understanding of how the trail is perceived, used, and maintained today. It also seeks to develop a unified vision for how the trail is managed and developed moving forward into the future. An effective trail vision is supported by goals, broad statements that express general public priorities as understood through data collection and public engagement undertaken during previous plan development activities. Goals are further elucidated by objectives, which lay out actionable tasks that contribute to fulfilling one or more goals. This memo proposes a draft vision, goals, and objectives for Project Advisory Committee feedback. Proposed language is intended to serve as springboard for discussion, not as a final determination of the form and content of the Plan’s vision, goals, and objectives. The vision, goals, and objectives will inform Plan recommendations for future trail-related projects, programs, and policies. Staff anticipate that the plan vision, goals, and objectives will be supplemented with an Implementation Plan to provide more detail about the location, overview, funding options, and responsible entities involved with specific projects or initiatives. The following assumptions were made when creating the draft material:

- When reviewing the draft content below, consider that the time horizon of the Plan should be less than about 10 years and include 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 be 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 and is expected to be used to guide a variety of fiscal decisions, grants, and related discussions.

**I. Vision Statement**

A vision statement is a concise articulation of an ideal future. It establishes and communicates the target that guides planning activities. Informed by public engagement and data collection efforts undertaken so far during the Plan for Ashuelot Rail Trail project, the following draft vision statement is offered for PAC consideration and discussion. PAC members are encouraged to examine whether content is missing from the statement or if any language needs clarification.

*The Ashuelot Rail Trail will function as a continuous transportation and recreation corridor that is scenic, accessible, safe and welcoming to a wide variety of users—local residents and visitors alike. Trail facilities will balance the needs and priorities of the trail’s many stakeholders, including state agencies, municipalities, landowners, user groups, businesses, and non-profit organizations, who will work collaboratively to maintain and develop the trail as*

*a shared public asset. The Trail will be widely celebrated as a valuable resource that enhances the surrounding area's quality of life, ecology, and economic vitality.*

## **II. Goals and Objectives**

Goals and objectives build upon the vision statement. Goals are broad statements that express general priorities as understood through previous project activities. An objective defines a specific activity that will contribute to fulfilling a goal. The following draft goals and objectives are offered for PAC consideration. Similar to the vision statement, PAC members are encouraged to assess whether any goals or objectives are missing or need clarification.

### Increase awareness of the trail, among both local residents and visitors.

- Develop and distribute promotional materials, including printed trail maps and brochures. Digital resources, such as a website, app, or social media presence, should also be considered.
- Establish a trail brand rooted in the history and unique characteristics of the surrounding communities. A trail brand could include elements such as a logo, standardized colors, graphics, and other design features that could be used on signage, maps or other promotional materials.
- Design and implement a wayfinding system standardized along the trail's entire route. Such a system could use a combination of signs and maps, located both on the trail and at nearby points of interest, e.g. village centers.
- Design and install signage that advertises the trail to motorists passing by trail crossings.

### Increase use of trail as an alternative for trips made by car.

- Integrate the Ashuelot Rail Trail with the surrounding roadway network, with a focus on improving connections between the trail and key points of interest, like village centers, schools, and residential neighborhoods.
- Increase the number of pedestrian and bicycle trips along the trail.
- Develop and maintain a trail surface easily traversed using a variety of transportation modes and by people of all ages and abilities.

### Expand opportunities for outdoor experiences.

- Improve connections between the rail trail and nearby parks, trails, and natural areas.
- Promote the trail as part of health and wellness initiatives.
- Protect sensitive habitats and natural resources along the trail corridor.

### Enhance regional and local economies.

- Promote the trail as a tourism destination.
- Work with relevant groups/orgs to organize and advertise on-trail events.
- Promote context-sensitive land uses that complement the trail. Near existing development, complementary land uses might include retail establishments, tourism-based industries, restaurants, or residential neighborhoods. In more rural areas, open space and agricultural land uses may be most appropriate.

### Create an on-trail experience that is accessible, safe and welcoming to a variety of users.

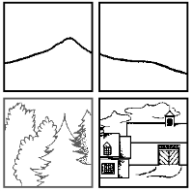
- Enhance trail crossing visibility using pedestrian warning signs, crosswalks, or other measures.
- Educate trail users regarding trail etiquette and regulations through posted signs and other outreach methods.
- Clearly delineate the public trail right-of-way from abutting privately-owned parcels.
- Identify areas where on-trail encroachment poses an issue and work with landowners to address encroachment of private property onto public land.
- Consider installation of lighting, where appropriate.
- Maintain a clean trail environment.
- Ensure that trailheads offer parking areas that accommodate a variety of users and vehicles, e.g. vans, buses, trailers.

Facilitate communication and collaboration among trail stakeholders.

- Establish an umbrella “friends of the trail” organization with members from a wide variety of stakeholder groups. Such an umbrella organization could function as an entity through which to coordinate trail maintenance, trail development projects, marketing, advocacy, fundraising, and more.

**Recommendation:**

**Review draft vision statement, goals, and objectives in preparation for discussion at the August 29<sup>th</sup> PAC meeting.**



***Southwest Region Planning Commission***  
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## **Ashuelot Rail Trail Plan Advisory Committee**

**October 17, 2019  
1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.**

**Whitcomb Hall  
17 Main Street  
Swanzey, NH 03446**

## **Agenda**

- I. Welcome & Introductions
- II. Minutes of August 29, 2019 Meeting
- III. Project Updates
- IV. Draft Plan and Implementation Plan
- V. Next Steps
- VI. Next Meeting
- VII. Adjourn

# 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