

TRAILS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Meeting via Zoom

January 25, 2022, at 8:00 a.m.

Attending: Bob White (chair), Delia Kaye (Natural Resources Director), Will Holden (Land Manager), David Clarke, Carlene Hempel (scribe), Bill Kemeza, Jonathan “Jay” Keyes

Members absent: Spencer Borden and Ken Miller

Stewards present: Kathy Angell, Beth Baryjames, Alice Galinat, Pam Howell, David Kirkwood, Wayne Lobb, Bouke Noordzij, Ned Perry

Visitors: John Dilworth, Richard Fahlander, Mark Gailus, Tanya Gailus, Bill Herring, Dayle James, Matt Johnson, Stu Johnstone, Nate Kemp, Mary McCarthy, Hugh McCrory, Barbara Pike, Phil Posner, Ellen Quackenbush, Karlen Reed, Scott Richardson, Wade Rubinstein

Chairman Bob White called the meeting to order at 8:05 a.m.

Minutes:

On a motion made by Bill Kemeza and seconded by David Clarke, minutes from the November meeting were unanimously approved as amended.

STEWARD REPORTS:

Annursnac-Baptist Book Conservation Land: Steward Pam Howell said a lot of trees have come down. Pam noted that she cannot access some of the trails because of ice on the slopes and ridges.

Baker Avenue Boat Launch & Picnic Area: Stewart Ellen Quackenbush reported no problems.

Barrett’s Mill Conservation Area: No report.

Cousins Park: No report.

Emerson-Thoreau Amble: Steward Wayne Lobb said there were no problems.

Mattison Field: Stewards are reporting out-of-control dogs who are off leash and charging up to people. Steward Kathy Angell also reported a large accumulation of invasive bittersweet. This information has been passed on to Land Manager Will Holden to take care of in the spring. Kathy also said the red trail heading toward the river is flooded, as it often is. Bob asked if it’s

possible to put a bog bridge there. Delia said the trail crosses onto private property, which would require permission from the landowner.

[Moses Pond/Ridge Trail](#): Steward Ned Perry said December was busy for the trail. He also mentioned that a small narrow bog bridge installed for six nearby families to access the pond was getting positive reviews. The families told him they had been using the bridge to access the pond for skating. He also reported that there has been a problem with cyclists using pickaxes and shovels to widen the trail around Gowing's Swamp, sometimes on private property. Ned said he had told concerned residents to report their complaints to police.

[October Farm Riverfront](#): Steward Bouke Noordzij reported someone built a fire by the lookout bench and noted that Will cleared that out. He noticed another firepit on Concord Land Conservation Trust land. Also, after encountering a woman who was having trouble walking on the ice, he wondered whether signage could be installed that warns of icy or dangerous conditions. He also said he's a steward with Concord Land Conservation Trust and at their monthly meeting learned of a dog walker traversing the trails with eight to ten dogs in tow.

[Old Rifle Range](#): Steward Alice Galinat reported the trails are in good shape. She said she needs more trail guides. She also said bikers are causing a problem in narrow places where the ice prohibits walkers from moving to the side.

[Powder Mill Woods](#): No report.

[Punkatasset Preserve](#): Steward David Kirkwood reported the trail is in good condition. The use continues to be light. He said he and Bob cleared some bittersweet from the Old Orchard area. People are skating on Hutchins Pond.

[Reformatory Branch Trail](#): Steward Bill Robichaud reported the trails are in good shape other than the ice. He noted that the issue with cars parked at the intersection of Bow and Lang streets is unresolved.

[Rivers Confluence](#): No report.

[Hapgood-Wright Town Forest](#): No report.

[West Concord Park](#): Steward Beth Baryames reported the trail is clear and safe.

[Westvale-Harrington](#): No report.

[White Pond Reservation](#): No report.

REGULAR BUSINESS:

Reformatory Branch Discussion: Bob welcomed Phil Posner, author of a citizen petition to ask Town Meeting for \$75,000 to fund a feasibility study related to the Reformatory Branch Trail, to present his ideas to the group.

Phil Posner (223 Laws Brook Road) said he a member of the town's new Transportation Advisory Committee but was speaking as a private citizen.

He said everyone's experience of the trail may be different and it's important for those differences to be acknowledged and recognized. Specifically, the grades in some places of the trail are a barrier on bad weather days. He said it's difficult to get through some areas for users who may have mobility challenges and noted that his proposal is intended to create a public process where people are able to talk and listen to what various constituencies have to say. Phil said he hopes that everyone can agree that we live in an interconnected world and that neighbors from other towns are also welcome in Concord. He also pointed out that the town of Concord has committed to decreasing greenhouse gases. He said his citizens' petition provides a process to allow the town manager to create a robust public process to continue the discussion.

Bob asked Phil to read the draft warrant article he had written. Phil explained that the article asks Town Meeting to appropriate \$75,000 for a feasibility study that will include public forums to be undertaken by a consultant. He further noted the study would investigate the feasibility of drainage and grading improvements.

Bill Kemeza noted that he was startled by the amount of money Phil was requesting in the warrant article. "Putting up that kind of money suggests a serious commitment to make changes and it's not money that's going to be used for small changes." He asked why Phil hadn't simply called for a public forum without asking for \$75,000.

Phil said he agreed it was a substantial amount of money and suggested he asked for that sum because he thought it was necessary to create a process to facilitate a public dialogue by using consultants. He said he had reached out to a landscape architect friend who suggested \$75,000 was a reasonable ask for such an endeavor.

Bill Kemeza followed up by noting that Phil emphasized barriers to accessibility on the Reformatory Branch Trail and wondered if Phil had ever walked the [Harry Beyer Trail](#), which is an assessed trail but not a fully accessible trail. He suggested the Reformatory Branch Trail could serve the same purpose.

Carlene Hempel said she appreciated the mention of making the trail accessible to a wide range of users but wondered why Phil hadn't mentioned that his petition and work to advocate for a feasibility study was also born from his connection to the Concord Cycling Advisory Group. Carlene said cycling on the trail is an important piece of context and thought the discussion should be transparent about that.

Phil responded that it's widely known he is an avid cyclist and that while he is indeed an advocate for safer biking, he is not advocating for anything specific to happen on the Reformatory Branch. Further, he noted that everyone can agree the trail is a former railroad line and because of that it is distinct from other trails in the woods. He further emphasized that what he is advocating is a community discussion and open dialogue.

Bill Kemeza followed by asking Phil if he can imagine spending \$75,000 on consultants who would then come back and say 'the trail is fine with some minor repairs. It's perfectly OK to leave it as it is.' Bill said he can't imagine that happening. He said it seems embedded in the plan that a redesign of the trail is what's going to take place.

Phil answered that he has no preconceived notions.

David Clarke said he lives near the trail and believes it needs attention in some spots.

Delia Kaye noted that when the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail was envisioned, it went through a "Friends' group" process to raise \$25,000 for a feasibility study and then worked with town staff to raise an additional \$5,000 in grant money. Furthermore, requesting \$75,000 in free cash, which is in short supply now with the recent approval of a new middle school – seems like a big ask. She said other paths for funding - CPA money, a Friends' group – are examples of alternative funding sources and suggested the current proposal was "putting the cart before the horse." Finally, she said there should be some agreement with the Planning Division, who would oversee the contract, and some buy-in from the town before a plan like this could move forward.

Ellen Quackenbush, a trail steward, (206 Prairie St.) said she thinks it would be best to form a commission through the Select Board to explore the issue rather than funding a feasibility study. She said she didn't think this was a good use of \$75,000. She said a forum such as those created for the Envision 2030 effort would make more sense.

Pam Howell, a trail steward, (668 Annursnac Hill Road) said she appreciates experiencing the seasons on the trail, including when they are and muddy, and doesn't mind when trails are sometimes impassable. She also said that she does not walk with her dogs anymore on the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail because of the fast bikes and worries that improvements including regrading the Reformatory Branch Trail would lead to the introduction of similar fast bikes there. She said she hopes this trail is preserved as a nature walk.

Mark Gailus (62 Prescott Road) said he doesn't trust the word "feasibility" without a clear specification of the process. He said it's "backward" to go to a feasibility study before you know what you want to build. "If you spend \$75,000 for a feasibility study you are asking for a million-dollar project," he said. He said at the Transportation Advisory Committee the night before, one of the possible priorities raised was a more bike-friendly treatment of Rte. 62 from the Bedford line and across Rte. 2 to West Concord. He noted that fast bikes are not compatible with people who are mobility- or hearing-challenged or people who are immersed in nature. He

further noted that fast bikers are probably happier dealing with cars and things they're used to than children, dogs, wheelchairs and people who are distracted.

Tanya Gailus (62 Prescott Road) added that the group should seek to hear from Bryan Windmiller personally about impacts on wildlife, in response to Mr. Posner's earlier reference to his conversation with Dr. Windmiller as a representative of Zoo New England.

Wayne Lobb, a trail steward, (223 Elsinore St.) said that in his experience, a process like this seeks to understand the exact needs of the users before embarking on a feasibility study. "I'm not sure that has been done," he said. He recommended that the group capture and put into writing who the actual customers are in this process. He volunteered to do this himself. But he said without a clear characterization of who is using the trail and their constraints and desires, doing a feasibility study is premature.

Kathy Angell, a trail steward, said she believes the proposal for a feasibility study is clearly focused on grading and drainage. Without knowing why this is being done, it's hard to know why the town should spend \$75,000 for this, she said. Why don't we start with hiring a consultant who looks at endangered species? she asked. She also noted there are other trails in town that are even less accessible and doesn't understand why accessibility is being discussed as a reason to improve this one specifically.

Hugh McCrory (59 Lee Drive) said he was very disappointed that some in the meeting were issuing pejorative comments about the feasibility study and said the decision should be with the town manager and Town Meeting about whether to spend \$75,000. He asked what the Trails Committee is doing to improve the state of the trail. He also objected to the implication that high-speed bikers are doing something wrong.

Committee Chair Bob White answered McCrory's question about the trail to say trail steward Bill Robichaud has worked very hard for many years to maintain the trail and believes he has done a good job at this. The Trails Committee will continue to do that minimal maintenance work, he said, which is the group's charge. He clarified that what Mr. Posner is advocating possibly goes beyond the scope of work of the Trails Committee.

John Dilworth (37 Hubbard Street) pointed out that he sees accessibility problems at both ends of the trail. He specifically referred to the muddy areas. He said we need to make the trails accessible for wheels of all kinds and that we need to reduce our reliance on cars for transportation.

Stuart Johnstone (91 Pine St.) believed that it was not an option for the town to keep the trail as it is. We must look at Bedford and see how that town's development of the trail will impact Concord.

Scott Richardson (260 Elsinore St.) recommended that Phil Posner amend his proposed warrant by removing the language about "grading and drainage" and add the goal of seeking a "holistic

nature-based design.” He also suggested that the \$75,000 could be used to improve bike riding on Concord’s roads.

Tanya Gailus (62 Prescott Road) spoke to correct the impression that anyone had spoken against bike use. She also stated that Bedford decided to pave their portion of the trail because they were informed that Concord was going to do it. She cited a meeting of the Bedford Bicycle Advisory Committee where this is recorded and can be found online.

Land Management Report: Will said he has been improving the town’s GIS trail data and as an example showed a before-and-after photo of Cousins Field to illustrate how different the enhanced images are. He’s also had new trail maps with the enhanced data printed off for [October Farm](#), the [Old Rifle Range](#) and [Punkatasset Preserve](#).

Will also said he’s working with an Eagle Scout at [White Pond](#) to install four new signs at the entrances.

Adjournment: to the meeting was adjourned at 9:30 a.m.

Next Meeting: The next Trails Committee meeting is scheduled for Feb. 22, 2022, at 8 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Carlene Hempel and Bill Kemeza