

Belmont Community Path Advisory Committee Notes

Meeting Date: 9/11/13

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Attendance included: Committee members present were Charlie Conroy, John Dieckmann, Joseph Noone, Cosmo Caterino, Brian Burke, Jeff Roth, Vince Stanton, Amy DeDeo, Price Armstrong, and Tomi Olson. Jeffrey Wheeler was present from the Office of Community Development. Price Armstrong served as revolving secretary. Other community members in attendance include Erich Ippen, Judith Sarno, Michael Cicalese, Cindy Taylor, Jessica Mink, Karen Shea, Hank Thidemann, and Rick Macchi.

The minutes from the previous meeting were accepted with minor amendments and clarifications.

Mr. Roth noted that the Fitchburg Cutoff Trail is officially open between Brighton Street to Alewife.

Mr. Roth noted that the Community Preservation Act (CPA) application was submitted for the proposal of the pedestrian/bicycle connection between the High School and Winn Brook neighborhood.

Mr. Roth gave an update on the meeting with Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) trail officials. They discussed underpasses that are currently being constructed, including a pedestrian tunnel into Assembly Square.

Dan Driscoll of DCR noted that State policy regarding night-time use is that users may use shared-use trails if passing through (i.e., commuting), but not if they are loitering. Municipally owned and operated trails may have different policies. Mr. Driscoll noted that police patrolling is usually undertaken by the towns in general and not by the State Police, even if they are State-owned. Jessica Mink noted that in general there are dual jurisdiction agreements.

Mr. Roth also noted that there is aerial surveying being done from Berlin to Waltham for the Mass Central Rail-Trail. Mrs. Olson asked why the surveying did not extend through Belmont. The reason is because the route has not been selected between Waltham and Cambridge, due in part to the former Mass Central rail corridor no longer being fully intact. A discussion of the Mass Central Rail Trail ensued. He finished with a discussion of construction practices and typical environmental remediation during construction.

Mr. Roth discussed the agenda and time-line for the Committee's work. It was agreed that the draft recommendations need to be created by mid-November, ahead of a final public forum.

There was also discussion about a potential abutters meeting. It was decided that any abutters meeting should take place prior to the draft report. A potential time would be later this fall. Mr. Roth tabled the discussion until the next meeting.

Mr. Roth was interested in the Committee sponsoring a bike ride on the new trail and other nearby trails in October, perhaps 10/13. Mr. Dieckmann recommended having it earlier than last year's, which was the end of October.

Mr. Roth updated the rules of governance document to include a higher cap (12) for the number of committee members. It was moved by Ms. Olson and seconded by Mr. Armstrong. It was adopted unanimously.

Mr. Roth and Mr. Dieckmann were re-elected as Chair and Vice Chair of the committee (respectively).

Mr. Dieckmann moved to change “chairperson” in the governance document to “chair.” The motion was moved and accepted unanimously.

Mr. Caterino pointed out that parking on Channing Road is a problem, and could be a greater problem if a path is built along the former Mass Central Railroad right-of-way. Mr. Noone echoed that sentiment, noting that he sees some people parking on Brighton Street and walking to Alewife Station. Mr. Conroy noted that with the Fitchburg Cutoff Trail already in place, parking is likely to be an issue regardless of whether the Belmont section is built. Mr. Stanton quoted a study from 2011 indicating that of the 1000 parking spaces in downtown Belmont, at peak times only 70% of the parking is occupied. Mrs. DeDeo noted that the point of the rankings is to incorporate these concerns, not to resolve them. It was also pointed out that the parking lots in Arlington and Lexington that are available for users of the Minuteman Bikeway all predated the existence of the Bikeway, hence new parking lots were not actually built specifically for the Minuteman Bikeway.

Ms. Mink noted that with the Somerville Community Path and the Somerville Linear Path, the majority of the users were neighborhood users. The parking issues, she said, are a product of the proximity to areas with tight parking restrictions (Cambridge, Somerville, Boston) and to transit areas. The presence of a bike path would likely only add marginally to the existing and overarching problems.

Mr. Caterino noted that environmental contamination could be an expensive consideration. Ms. Mink noted that other trails have encountered this, and dealt with it in many ways. Mr. Burke noted that, since the contamination may currently exist, he would like to see it capped off with the asphalt of a trail, so it would not continue to seep into neighbor's yards. Mr. Dieckmann noted that the bottom line is that environmental contamination might be a cost factor, but would not be considered a “show stopper” to any particular route along former railroad right-of-ways.

Mr. Caterino noted that drainage is also a cost factor. Mr. Burke noted that building a path would potentially improve the drainage if it is designed well, acknowledging that as a possible cost.

Mr. Roth passed out a potential abutters survey. Mr. Caterino and Mr. Noone asked why there was no sound wall as an option. Mr. Roth responded that it shouldn't be included due to a wall restricting access to the trail from homeowners living along the trail. Mr. Armstrong also asked if it was fair to include an option which is unprecedented and is doubtful whether it would be funded. He then suggested that Mr. Noone and Mr. Caterino provide a picture of the type of wall that they are envisioning.

Mr. Sullivan echoed what Mr. Armstrong said. Mrs. Taylor pointed out that some sound barriers were installed on the Cambridge Purecoat building to quiet industrial noise emanating from the factory. Brian Burke later volunteered to find pictures of sound walls on highways. The rest of the pictures would be divvied up between Mr. Conroy, Mr. Dieckmann and Mr. Armstrong.

Mr. Roth distributed photos of Rail-With-Trail examples in Massachusetts. Mr. Armstrong gave an overview of the pictures he took of the Springfield, Manhan, and Norwottuck Rail Trails, and Ms. Mink gave an overview of pictures that she took on the East Boston Greenway which runs next to the Blue Line near Logan Airport.

Mr. Erich Ippen gave an update of the Claypit Pond Reservation.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:30p.

