

Rails to Trails in Hampton Falls Minutes and Discussion Summary

Hampton Falls Town Hall – Monday, 7/11/2022 - 5:30 PM

Guest Speakers: Scott Bogle from the Rockingham Planning Commission and Julie Isbill from the National Park Service

Residents/Department Heads in attendance:

Alex Dittami (Depot Subcommittee Chair), Ed Beattie (Selectman), Mark Lane (Selectman), Jay Lord (Hampton Falls Fire Chief), Ryan Veno (Hampton Falls Police Chief), Karen Anderson (Town Administrator), Lyn Stan (Parks and Recreation Commission Chair), Beth Forgione (Parks and Recreation Commission Secretary), Tracy Beattie (Historical Society), Ann Reis (Conservation Commission), Barbara Goodman (LAS School Board), Abby Tonry (Planning Board), Steve Sabatini, Larry Smith, Mike Stan, Alan Ganz

Scott Bogle presented the current status of the New Hampshire Seacoast Greenway (NHSG), which is New Hampshire's segment of the East Coast Greenway (ECG), envisioned as a 3000 mile long non-motorized multi-use path extending from Maine to Florida. Most of the NHSG route will follow the abandoned Hampton Branch rail line that extends from Seabrook to Portsmouth through Hampton Falls. Following the presentation, the floor was opened for discussion and questions. A video of the presentation and the PowerPoint presentation are available on the Hampton Falls town website at - https://www.townhallstreams.com/stream.php?location_id=107&id=46484

Major points made during the presentation (refer to PowerPoint document):

- 1) Portions of the Greenway (aka Rail Trail) have already been implemented along the eastern seaboard from Florida to Maine. Additional sections have been identified which are in various stages: some with funding secured, some not yet funded, some still in design and some under construction.
- 2) The Greenway is not managed by one group, but by local groups responsible for those sections in their areas.
- 3) In New Hampshire the 14 mile stretch from Seabrook to Portsmouth is being addressed in three phases including: Phase 1 (Hampton-Portsmouth); Phase 2 (Seabrook) and Phase 3 (Hampton Falls and southern Hampton) In addition to 14 miles of rail trail, the NHSG will include a combination of on-road and off-road sections through Portsmouth. There is also an interim on-road route, designated in 2008 with signs installed, that follows Route 1, 1A and 1B.
- 4) The Department of Transportation (DOT) draft 2023-2032 Ten Year Transportation Plan is on the governor's desk or should be soon, if not already. This includes the project to

build the trail through Hampton Falls in 2032. (See other documentation for details of plans, phases and projected dates.)

- 5) RPC worked with the UNH Engineering Department in 2016 on a conceptual design for the portion that could pass through Hampton Falls.
- 6) This included assessing the three railroad bridges and several washed out areas along the causeway. (See aerial photos in presentation package.) The UNH team and RPC consulted with a number of groups with an interest in these areas including Department of Transportation (purchased causeway for transportation use), Department of Environmental Services (tidal flows), Division of Historic Resources (historical value of the bridges and historic places) and Eversource (owns pylons along the causeway).
- 7) UNH design concept is to open up the causeway washed out areas to improve tidal flow and span them with boardwalk, elevate the main causeway two to three feet which would not expand the foot print (established using the Coastal Risks and Assets Commission Report), rehabilitate the stone abutments, put in new steel spans because the old ones cannot be rehabilitated.
- 8) Referenced the Seacoast Transportation Corridor Vulnerability Study regarding anticipated impacts of sea-level rise on coastal highways including seasonal high tides, wave action and storm surge. Will be using the latest dynamic coastal flooding model to assess designs for the causeway . Aware of the flooding along Route 1.
- 9) Technical Assistance Grant from the National Park Service has been obtained. There are now three working groups – one looking at trailheads and community connections, another on signage and another with non-profit groups and volunteers to promote the trails and raise funds and volunteers to maintain the trails.
- 10) Looked at the 23 road crossings In New Hampshire for trailhead potential. Identified whether there is adjacent public land for parking potential, whether it was suitable for just walk on or bike access or, due to grade level, no access at all. Ten crossings were identified with potential for parking and another six with walk on and bike access. Working with town officials and residents in each town to see what interest there is and what potential connections the trail can have to the community.
- 11) In Hampton Falls there are two locations with potential locations for a trailhead - Depot Road which currently has 10 parking spaces and is a half mile from the town center and Brimmer Lane. Brimmer Lane was originally seen as having potential for walk on or bike access, but may not be possible due to land ownership at that location. (See documentation for locations in the surrounding towns.) Currently there is no plan to expand the parking or facilities at the Depot Road location. (Note: there is a path along the old rail line at Brimmer Lane used and maintained by the Seabrook Power Plant for emergency evacuation.)
- 12) The Route 1 and Route 101 interchange in Hampton is targeted for a redesign (in the Ten-year plan for construction in 2028). The design study that led to this project also called for construction of a trailhead on state land at the interchange as part of the project. It could offer significant capacity for parking and possibly additional facilities. RPC will advocate for inclusion of the trailhead (and hopefully towns will too) when project engineering begins. Although this location is not in Hampton Falls, it does have close proximity to the Hampton Falls town center.

13) The key questions being asked are what is the town's vision for the Greenway and how can it be beneficial to the town, what destinations in town could be connected to the trail, how could town take advantage of the trail, for example, school visits.

Open Discussion and Comments

Larry Smith - Concerned about relocating the rail trail to Route 1 as it is much too dangerous.

Alex Dittami – What are the plans for maintenance and policing?

Scott Bogle – A maintenance agreement would need to be established between town and the DOT. The town would be responsible for routine maintenance and brush clearance; the DOT would retain responsibility for major capital maintenance such as major storm damage. Towns generally use volunteers.

Larry Smith – Since there are no trees along the proposed section in Hampton Falls there shouldn't be much to maintain.

Scott Bogle – Noted that the NH Coastal Program (NHCP) is interested in the design horizon (50 years? 100 years?) and therefore how much to elevate the trail to account for Sea Level Rise. The recommendation from NHCP was to elevate enough to remain passable at normal high tide with projected sea level increases, but design to withstand over-wash during storms and king tide events. This would limit just how much elevating is needed. The current assumption is that this would require elevating the causeway about 3 feet which would keep it dry except in extreme circumstances. It would be designed to withstand over-wash periodically 4 to 6 time per year.

Steve Sabatini – What is the timeline? Is it still 2023 to 2032.

Scott Bogle – The Ten-Year Plan on the Governor's desk covers 2023 to 2032. The Phase 3 project is currently programmed for engineering beginning in 2027 and construction in 2032. They are hopeful to secure private or federal funding move the engineering plan forward a bit which could result in construction moving up a bit as well. Funding is a key factor in the timeline.

Steve Sabatini – Is it a safe area?

Lyn Stan – There is no lighting. Concerned about navigating a boat over the raised berm.

Scott Bogle – Need to defer the boat access issues to the engineers. (Response on safety question came later – see below).

Alan Ganz – Today it's not easy to get across Route 1. Concerned about additional traffic and boat trailer parking at Depot Road location.

Scott Bogle - Since there are only a few spaces at Depot Landing, he wouldn't expect a big increase in traffic on Depot Road – five non-resident spots turning over a few times in a given day. The Route 1/101 location has greater potential as a regional trailhead with significant parking. His understanding is that The town owns most of the land at the landing and could

theoretically decide not to have trail access at Depot Road at all. The state owns only the 60 foot wide corridor where the rail was.

Larry smith – The 10 parking spaces are for cars only. Would have to park trailers along the road. It's not a rail trail issue; it's a town parking issue.

Mike Stan - Trail will bring more people to the Depot location so the parking issue will need to be addressed.

Mike Stan – Has Seabrook designated trail heads? His understanding is trailheads must have bathrooms and drinking water.

Scott Bogle – Trailheads do not have to have these facilities – they were referenced as desired amenities in the 2021 trailhead access report, but were never envisioned for Depot Landing. They could be just walk on access. Only a few trailheads along the New Hampshire corridor will have these facilities. Possible locations for these facilities are the Route 1/Route 101 interchange, the “Stump Dump” site in Portsmouth where the trail passes under Route 33, and the NHDOT-owned site at the Hampton/North Hampton town line. Current access points in Seabrook include at the New Hampshire/Massachusetts state line on Route 286 and behind the Seabrook Public Library.

Mike Stan – When in Seabrook happening?

Scott Bogle – The Seabrook section is programmed in the NHDOT Ten Year Plan for engineering beginning in 2027 and construction in 2030.

Alex Dittami – Are there any funds for educational stuff?

Julie Isbill – There is grant money out there. Because the locations in Hampton Falls are on the marsh and have educational and historical value (well suited to science studies, history of salt marsh haying, etc.) there might be more available locally and federally.

Scott Bogle - Optimistic that private funding might be available as well.

Alex Dittami – Any rumors about land purchases?

Scott Bogle - Not aware of any.

Scott Bogle – As to safety there are good national data showing drops in illicit activity when abandoned rail corridors are converted to rail trails. As more people use the area there is less opportunity for mischief.

Steve Sabatini – Not expecting a noticeable increase of people as it's still going to be a bit remote.

Larry Smith – Agreed with Steve.

Alex Dittami – Is there economic opportunity for the town?

Scott Bogle – There have been lots of studies nationally of economic impacts of rail trails. Two particularly extensive ones looked at about a dozen trails each in the mid-Atlantic states and in NY state. These found average trail user spending of about \$15 per person per day. Multiply

that by several hundred thousand trail users per year and the impact can be significant. The ECG in Newburyport sees over 1000 users per day. In Salisbury which is more rural the counts are more like 300/day. The NHSG will connect seven NH communities, so in aggregate (most trips won't travel the whole length) would expect over 100,000 users/year. Those may be more concentrated in Portsmouth as a larger community, but the marsh will be a highlight. The economic potential for Hampton Falls depends on how the town plans to connect the trail to the town.

Abby Tonry – What would the ideal distance between trailheads?

Julie Isbill –3 or 4 trailheads with parking and amenities would be desirable along the 14 mile stretch, but facilities needs could be met off the trail if access is available to them nearby (i.e. town center). For people walking or biking to the trail rather than driving, additional more frequent walk-on/bike-on access points are desirable.

Scott Bogle – The town could choose to not have parking access to the two locations identified (Depot Road or Brimmer Lane) if another option is nearby. Alex Dittami had noted potential for parking in Hampton Falls village center to reduce traffic on Depot Road, and the Route 1/101 interchange will ideally be a nearby regional trailhead.

Mark Lane – As to economic impact - would like to see sewer along Route 1 which in combination with a rail trail might make Hampton Falls a more popular stopping point, promoting more businesses along Route 1.

Scott Bogle – While there is federal funding to build the trail itself, funding for trailheads will be the responsibility of the towns and the non-profit NH Seacoast Greenway Alliance – whether through private funding, federal grants like the Recreational Trails Program, or possibly town resources.

Jay Lord – Design considerations - There are four washed out bridges along the causeway at this time. The bridge just south of Depot is acting as a defensive barrier for Route 1 by slowing the water from high tides and storms. The design needs to consider this. Whittier pond is currently fire protection along Route 1 in Hampton Falls. Removing the dam upriver would eliminate the pond. The Route 1/101 interchange was once a dump so no houses can be built there, thus a great location for a trailhead which could benefit Hampton Falls.

Scott Bogle – Other considerations in the trail design still in progress – the NH Division of Historic Resources is interested in retaining the abutments along the trail if possible, and has some regulatory ability to do that, but we don't know how hard they would push to keep them. The seacoast transportation vulnerability study is looking at impacts of water rise and coastal flooding, including at Route 1 near the Hampton-Hampton Falls town line. Continuing to work with UNH on the causeway. An opportunity here is that the trail project can create a recreation and transportation facility and also have a marsh restoration benefit by improving tidal flow. To date they haven't looked at the protection function of the causeway referenced by Jay Lord. Scott will contact Jay for more information. Opening up the causeway will need to consider a variety of impacts and will need to be balanced.

Alex Dittami – Is there an alternative to the marsh for a rail trail?

Scott Bogle - Not sure at this point, but due to the additional space that would be needed along Route 1, probably not. RPC is looking at available right of way there, but also need to consider safety problems with all the turning in and out of driveways. Still seeking to use the causeway and addressing tidal flow, etc.

Jay Lord – Are there flood plain grants available to buy up buildings abutting the marsh?

Scott Bogle – Not sure. That's a much bigger issue than the rail trail.

Dittami – Quite a bit of erosion already, several washed out areas along the rail line so need to be careful with design.

Adjourned at 7:10 pm

Prepared by: Beth Forgione