



Town of Warner, New Hampshire
Conservation Commission
Wednesday, February 7, 2024
Meeting Minutes

Warner Town Hall 7:00 pm
In Person Meeting
Zoom Access

IN ATTENDANCE:

Nancy Martin (chair), Susi von Oettingen, Alice Chamberlain, Ken Cogswell, Michael Amaral, Doug Allen, Phil Stockwell (alternate), Jackie Germain (alternate), Scott Warren (alternate)

Public attendees – see attached sign-up sheet

Meeting began at 7:00 pm

1. Concord to Lake Sunapee Rail Trail Informational Meeting – Facilitated by Butch Burbank. Presentation by Tim Blagden. See Zoom recording for powerpoint presentation and CLSRT.org website for more information.

The Friends of the Concord to Lake Sunapee Rail Trail is a 501c3 non-profit. Board members represent multiple towns. Coordinate with landowners for access to their land. Goal is to build something somewhere every year – donate/build/enjoy/repeat. Active in Concord, Hopkinton, Warner/Sutton, Bradford, Newbury. Of 34 miles, 11.5 is located in Warner.

Goals of existing master plan include the rail trail concept. Since 2017, 18 parcels of land have been either donated or have easements. Do not build until all easements from point A to B have been obtained. Have had 2 years' worth of technical assistance from the National Park Service, assistance from Dartmouth senior engineering students. Various surveys taken in the past indicated that there is support from town residents for a walking/cycling path.

Began outreach to community including the Warner Conservation Commission in 2013 for a site walk. Multiple Town Applications since 2014:

2014 – Transportation Alternative Program application by the Town for Exit 9 project (did not get the funding)

2021 – Congressional Funding request from the Town with Sen. Shaheen for Exit 8 and Exit 9 – the Town did not get the grant

2022 – Congressional Funding with Rep. Kuster for Exit 9 (CLSRT application) – received the grant.

2023 – The Town applied for a Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Grant for Exit 8 – pending

Summarized historical WCC participation and support between 2014 and 2020 for various aspects of the project (Exit 8 rail trail section, acquisition of land from DOT).

Warner River Corridor Management Plan highlights the cultural and recreational resources of interest, including the public's interest in accessing the Warner River for recreational uses. Management Plan developed by the Warner River Local Advisory Committee.

Summarized existing portions of the trail and those under construction in the various towns (Concord, Hopkinton/Contoocook, Bradford, Warner).

Described the Exit 9 project, including a foot bridge parallel to I89. Provided a history of the roads and Warner River through time. The Project is about 0.5 miles of trail, will provide access from the Town to the shopping area (Market Basket, McDonalds, etc). High traffic area, would provide safe access for cyclists and walkers. Project will be managed by the Local Public Access process – is a public process, mandates hiring a consultant, public hearings, requires a National Environmental Policy Act review, presentation of alternatives including the “no-build” option. The NHDOT requires Town to be responsible party, the FCLSRT has agreed to be a subparty for the Town for future management responsibility.

Presentation ended at 7:39 pm. Facilitation by Butch Burbank requesting audience participation – questions, statements.

Question - Of 18 parcels donated to the rail trail, about half are town-owned, but will provide a definitive answer later.

Dr. Christopher Lopez, resident – supporter of project, spoke to the benefits of public greenways including this project. Suggests working together to reach a solution/compromise.

Martha Bodnarik – does not want to live in a recreational destination.

David Carroll – not a supporter, questions the infrastructure being put on a functioning ecosystem.

Bev Howe – lives on Waterloo, on the street. The traffic that would be put on the road is not wanted by the residents of Waterloo. Bicycles and pedestrians would be on the road.

Andy Bodnarik – Questions if any permits have been acquired for the sections of the Exit 9 rail trail – number of issues that will need to be dealt with. Response – the Project will undergo the state and federal process for permit review, environmental review, NH endangered species act review.

Barb Diekman– Warner resident, in favor of the rail trail as well as for a clear understanding of environmental impacts and seeking ways to work together for a solution.

John Leavitt – Questions if the construction/management will cost the Town money. Discussion regarding the grant to fund Exit 9 – the rail trail group applied for the grant, the first two times the Town applied for the grants and did not get the grants.

Bev Howe – Questions why the grant was accepted if the Town residents have not been asked whether they wanted the grant. Response – Tim believes there is wide support within the community.

David Carroll - Speaks to the impacts to wildlife from a constant flow of people and dogs.

Martha Bodnarik – Believes the Town will be responsible for paying for damage to the future trail and the bridge, will cost the Town money. Believes that the project should be put in front of the town.

Steve Hall – Asks what the economic development benefits to the town would be and where would people park? Response – the Exit 9 Project is a short trail, would not bring many people. If there is a connection to Contoocook Village to Warner – would have cyclists/visitors take short trips. Noted that 80% of the usage (based on other rail trails) are by locals – used as a form of exercise as well as transportation. When the trail gets longer, attracts people from further away, total build out most likely decades away. Would have longer trips, maybe some overnight stays. Parking – critical for a good trail. Possible to get the State Shed at the end of Waterloo for parking.

John Leavitt – Why did the Rail Trail folks not bring this before town meeting first? Derek Lick – stated the grant went to the Rail Trail, funding from federal and private funds. No line item expense to the Town, so that does not rise to the level of a town vote. Expenditure of time (oversight) by the Town does not require a town vote (based on Town Council).

Martha Bodnarik - In disagreement that the rail trail should be brought to Town Meeting.

Andy Budnarick – Suggested that the Exit 9 State property will be difficult to acquire (environmental issues, etc).

Ed Mical – Warner’s Emergency Management Director – is the reimbursement going to the Town or the Rail Trail? Who is supplying the up-front money? Response - The matching funds raised go into an escrow account to pay for everything that goes before the environmental study. No contracts will be signed before the funds have been verified. The Town will not be paying the bills.

Kristen Riley – Board of Concord Lake Sunapee Rail Trail – there will be numerous public information sessions as part of this process. The Board Meetings are open to the public as well.

Tim Blagden – suggested a walk of the Project at any time. Reach out to Tim.

Clyde Carson – supporter of rail trail. Is part of the review committee for engineering firms and has questioned the potential firms regarding the environmental review.

Deborah Mahar – Agrees that there are questions and concerns that need to be addressed. Feels this is a positive project due to benefits to the community.

Conservation Commission questions:

Alice Chamberlin – Who will be responsible for the liability for the rail trail? Tim Blagden-The Concord Lake Sunapee Rail Trail committee will be responsible (it is in writing). Will snowmobiles

be allowed on the rail trail? The easements are specific to no motorized vehicles, with the exception of snowmobiles. That decision is up to the landowners providing the easements. However, the easements must be connected so that the snowmobiles can use the trail. If landowners say no, there will be gates to prevent snowmobile access.

Michael Amaral – Commented on the Warner Conservation Commission’s support in the early days of the project. However, as more information becomes available, need some reconsideration. Recommend looking at the Warner River from the Town line in Bradford to Davisville/Contoocook on both sides of the river, note how much of the rail trail would border the Warner River? Look at where the rail road was, an indication of where the rail trail might go. Using low traffic streets is desirable. Addressing comment from the public – is a lot harder than it should be. This project causes him to pause, because some of the species present do not co-exist well with human presence.

Alice Chamberlin – How many easements needed to complete the trail? Response – Approximately 66 parcels in Warner. Question - Provide a quick overview of the CMAQ grant? The Town applied for the grant, needs \$600,000 match that the CLSRT must come up with. If the match isn’t reached, the Town would/could turn down the grant. The trail is not definitive, would go through sensitive areas.

2. Approve January 3, 2024 meeting minutes – Approved with edits (typos)

Meeting adjourned at 8:53 pm