

Merrymeeting Trail Meeting Notes

Updated January 3, 2012 v3

Attendees

Victoria Boundy, Linda Christie, Rebecca Farnham, Jon Edgerton, Steve Musica, Dave Wood, Victor Langelo, Andy Hendrickson, Nate Rudy, Nicole Briand, Tom Reeves, Burnham Martin

Wright-Pierce Study – Update

Jon Edgerton provided an update on Wright-Pierce's Merrymeeting Trail project. They rearranged the VHB feasibility study into logical segments to consider for construction including all the related segment information such as costs and environmental impacts. Jon, Nicole Briand, and Rod Melanson recently met with Dan Stewart, Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator at the Maine Department of Transportation, to discuss the study and the project. Dan suggested some adjustments to segment boundaries as well as creating more segments in village areas to provide some easy-to-build first sections. Dan suggested applying for funds in the next Quality Communities Program grant round, which has an anticipated deadline of next summer. Meeting participants noted that Dan is an advocate for developing an interim on-road route for the trail. They also raised the issue of declaring the trail to be of statewide significance. Dan said he would be able to discuss this issue in the early in 2012. Jon noted that Wright-Pierce's work will be finished up by year's end and that the next steps would include building public support in anticipation of one or more grant applications in the spring.

Organizational Structure – Update

Tom Reeves provided an update on work related to the inter-municipal agreement. The inter-municipal agreement will create a four-municipality organization to serve as a legal entity to plan, build, and maintain the trail. He has contacted three of the four town/city managers for initial discussions about the concept. He has also drafted an agreement. Next steps after January are to seek buy-in from the current Merrymeeting Trail group then present the agreement to the four town managers for their advice about how to move ahead. He also anticipated asking the regional planning commission to review the agreement. Tom said that the Maine Municipal Association would review the draft agreement if requested to do so by the towns. The final step in the process would be filing the agreement with the secretary of state's office.

There is a question about whether the agreement needs to be ratified by town meeting votes or whether a vote by select boards would be sufficient. Tom plans to include language that would authorize both procedures. He noted that even if it is legally possible for a board of selectmen to approve joining an inter-municipal agreement, most would likely recommend going to town meeting vote. He plans to talk again to town leaders in February.

The question was raised as to whether there is enough time to prepare for town meeting votes in 2012. The group had mixed opinions about that. It is possible to apply for Quality Community Programs funding without the inter-municipal organization in place.

The question was raised whether the best near-term action would be to renew the four-town memorandum of understanding. Tom felt that at this point the agreement needs to be more formal. However, he agreed that it would be logical to move forward simultaneously with an

application to the Quality Community Programs and with the inter-municipal agreement. Jon agreed and noted that Dan Stewart had expressed support for the idea that towns would submit one or more applications to the QCP Transportation Enhancement program. Jon noted that history has shown that there is a lag time of over a year between submitting an application and beginning engineering design or construction. With that lag, it would be possible to go to 2013 town meetings for the inter-municipal agreement and still have it in place before work began on a trail segment or segments.

The group discussed timing of town meetings. Town meetings dates for 2012 are as follows: Richmond – April 3, Bowdoinham – June, Topsham – May 18. Gardiner’s City Council can make municipal decisions at any time. Items for the warrant would need to be submitted well ahead of the meeting dates. The question was raised as to what is needed to prepare for town meetings. While folks thought the inter-municipal agreement would be uncontroversial because it involves no money all agreed that it would make sense to prepare talking points beforehand. Others noted that we will need to develop these talking points for other outreach as well.

Next Steps

The next agenda item was creating a workplan for the coming year. That discussion is captured in the attached draft workplan.

Other Business

Under new business, Tom brought up the question as to whether there are plans for pedestrian and bicycle access to the new Richmond-Dresden bridge? Meeting participants agreed that it would be important to have pedestrian/bicycle access. Vicky said she would check on what MDOT is currently planning. It may be necessary for local groups to contact MDOT to advocate for bike/ped facilities. Victor will raise the issue with the Merrymeeting Wheelers. Folks pointed out that the earlier in the planning process MDOT knows about necessary changes, the easier it is for them to make design improvements.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on January 11, 2012 at 11:00 a.m. at the Bowdoinham town office.