

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS MEETING

## Town of Epsom

April 2, 2019 | 6:00 PM, Epsom Town Office Meeting Room | 940 Suncook Valley Highway

### Meeting Summary

In attendance: **Glenn Horner**, Epsom EDC/Trails Subcommittee (walk/bike), Zoning Board; **Denyce Gagne**, Epsom Resident/former Cons Comm (walk); **Roxan Chasse**, Epsom Resident (horse); **Barb Barksdale**, Epsom Resident (horse); **Jenn Drew**, Epsom Resident (horse); **Abby Aucella**, Barrington (horse, hike, bike); **Sandy Hurd**, Loudon (horse); **Donna Michaud**, Strafford (horse); **Debbie Briscoe**, Brentwood/NH Horse Council (horse). CNHRPC Staff **Craig Tufts** and **Stephanie Alexander**.

Craig (CNHRPC) led introductions and asked everyone to describe their interest in Epsom trails.

The group had a brief discussion about recent proposed horse/equestrian legislation originating in Strafford because of horse piles left on public surfaces. The introduced legislation has been shown to be non-effective from all segments. Glenn (Epsom) said he wrote a letter to the editor of Concord Monitor about it.

Abby (Barrington)- Would love to see overnight accommodations camping for a week -long trip for horse rides.

Another commented on her interest in long trails and connections, not short segments, where horses can go. She noted she was also a walker and rode bicycles.

Roxan (Epsom)- Own acres on River Road and said a snowmobile trail runs through her property for which she gave permission. Horse owners not always welcomed on snowmobile trails and she would like to see them welcomed by landowners.

Debbie (Brentwood)- Is a NH Horse Council member, NH Trails Advisory Committee and has passion for town trails, likes to watch out for the horse interests. She expressed an interest in the planning component of trails and would like to see connectivity for trails with signage and access throughout NH.

Sandy (Loudon)- Organizes up to 15 trail rides per year for which she and members need to pay to ride in specific locations. Snowmobile trails are available but are not used for horses. She would like to see more signed, connected trails open to horses. Craig directed her to Loudon Trails Committee.

Barb (Epsom) - Lives across the river and is a proponent for horses. She described how several years ago, she tried to organize horse owners to talk to snowmobile clubs for collaboration, but there was no interest. She had previously owned 2 tracts of Epsom land containing snowmobile trails that she made accessible for multi-use, but the partnership did not succeed. She noted the snowmobile clubs put in much work to set up and maintain their trails network and landowner relations, and she would be happy to help do the same thing for horseback riding. There are few places for horses to ride. A police officer told her horses were illegal on the road and she

informed him of the law (horse is a pedestrian if led, a vehicle if being ridden). Landowner indemnity and liability can be large issues. In the area a decade ago, many properties were closed to because of an injured hunter who did not obtain the owner's permission to use the property.

The group held a discussion that legislation is good for liability now, but perception is out there. Those landowner liability questions will come up when talking with landowners. Educating riders and property owners is a high priority for all types of trail uses.

There were general questions about what public activities were allowable under current use lands, and why horse activities were not included. Stephanie (CNHRPC) said there are different categories of current use and landowners can still post their land to deny certain public uses, as the land is still privately owned. Since current use laws change, she suggested checking the NH Department of Revenue Administration website regarding current use land owner posting.

Jenn (Epsom) – Enjoys riding Barb's horses.

Denyce (Epsom) – Is an avid hiker and dog walker. Former Coms Comm member. She has been working with Glenn on a potential trails project to connect Webster Park to the Epsom Baptist Church.

Glenn- Is a member of the Epsom Zoning Board, and the Economic Development Committee. He wanted to become involved with trails and worked with Denyce to map the southern end of rail trail in Epsom. He noted trail system brings trail users and business. As a former Conservation Commission member, he would like to see more outdoor activities available to people in Town.

Craig said that CNHRPC is listening to what the Suncook Valley Trails (SVT) towns have to say about a potential rail trail and connections, and are collecting feedback from public to develop an overall plan that contains recommendations for Towns to pursue. He said he will remain available as a resource to assist Towns with project but that it's up to the Town to develop the projects and maintain them. He said the focus on the SVT is because of the resurgence of rail trails in the state. The Concord to Lake Sunapee Rail Trail initiative is in a similar situation as to what has happened over time to the SVT, with the rail abandoned and reverted to landowners or used as highways. Craig defined trails as publicly accessible trails for the purposes of this SVT Plan, with connectivity and economic development. Any new trails would have to be formalized and should work together with other trails clubs and landowners. The objective of the SVT Plan is not to infringe upon the existing informal trails and official snowmobile trail network, but to collaborate.

Debbie mentioned where the SVT "trail" or potential trails exist, most of the sections will run through private properties. Crag said the challenge is to find a way around the barriers. He introduced the **SVT Working Map for Epsom**, indicated where the known snowmobile trails are, other trails, and where the public areas are located. The attendees sat around the map and referred to it for the remainder of the meeting.

The group discussed potential opportunity areas in Epsom, but noted parking for horse trailers could be an issue. Glenn said that he was able to work out a deal with the Epsom Bible Church for snowmobile trailer parking

and may be able to work out a similar arrangement for horse trailers too. This area could be a great connection to the Tarlton Road Epsom Town Forest trails.

The group considered connectivity issues and possibilities on the map. Since the Suncook River avulsion washed away a lot of the sand for riding along Huckins Road and under the bridge, horses and pedestrians no longer have access. This large washout erased the rail bed, eliminating a critical connection from the main section of Town- owned rail bed to Route 4. The challenges for trails users are bridging this large washout and the new stream bed and getting to/across/ under Route 4. Craig had walked this section with Glenn & Denyce. Glenn said the Town is readying a new project to bring municipal water to the Epsom Traffic Circle area that includes excavating equipment for the water main. He said he could bring this discussion back to the Economic Development Committee to consider for passage underneath Route 4 for all (hikers, walkers, snowmobiles, equestrians).

Discussions included Goboro Road has been repaved and widened, vehicles are now much faster, traveling 45-50 mph. The Police Department has been monitoring speeds, but it is no longer suitable for any type of trails use.

Several trails exist within the New Orchard and Goboro Road corridor that suitable for walking, riding, etc. Historical features include cellar holes, stone walls, and old rangeways in this vicinity, including Class VI roads. Craig asked about potential linkages. It was noted that Odiorne Pond is owned by Audubon and no horses are allowed now. At the end of Highland Drive, the trail will link back down to the Fort Mountain Trailwinders' snowmobile trails. Other trails enter onto New Orchard road and are privately owned, so permission is needed from landowners. **This block of forest land between Goboro Road and New Orchard Road was circled on the Map as a potential area to investigate trail options and a possible trail bypassing traffic on Goboro Rd.**

Craig asked the group where the main trail corridors are in Epsom. Bear Brook State Park was identified, where equestrians prefer 5-mile to 20-mile loops unless there are B&Bs with stabling available. **A block of forest just north of the park could be another location to look for trail opportunities.** This would expand options at Bear Brook State Park and offer more options for loops.

Craig asked about the Suncook Valley Rail Trail section leading up to Pittsfield's Webster Mills Road. Denyce and Glenn agreed said the trail here is beautiful, scenic, and is close enough visit the river. The land is privately owned and permission would be needed, but the trail leads up to the Pittsfield Wastewater Treatment Plant. Barb noted some of the railroad ties are gone or deteriorating. There are historic granite trestles in the woods, with abutments still in place.

Barb mentioned that several years ago, a landowner disallowed use of the informal trail on their property she was regularly riding horses on by blockading the trail and posting a No Horses Allowed sign. The group agreed this situation no longer exists in the area noted. Craig said having an established Town Trails Committee provides a venue for people to bring up and resolve these types of issues. The group agreed.

Craig asked whether the River Road area would be a good SVT connection. Mentions were made of horses getting hoof bruises with the stones on that road. Black Hall Road becomes River Road then turns back into Blackhall Road in Bear Brook Park.

The group noted large powerline corridors run through Epsom that accommodate all types of users. Walkers, bikers, horses, snowmobiles all use the powerline corridors. The question was whether the utility company officially permits this type of activity. **It was agreed further research is needed to determine proper, if any, trails usage along the powerlines.**

A challenge identified is the need for trailhead vehicle parking and trailer parking, with trail access for a range of users.

Craig asked if there were some potential, realistic rail trail projects or connections that could be pursued. This would include grants, Town efforts, landowner agreements, or construction. The group identified:

**1) Webster Mills railbed trail, which is privately owned.** A suggestion was made for a potential linear trail easement secured on the Webster Mills section properties. Craig noted less permanent landowner agreements can be useful for gaining access to a trail, but would not be preferred if there are to be financial investments, such as trail hardpack, bridges, etc. With investments, it would be prudent to obtain a permanent easement for the trail.

**2) Connections from the Town Owned Rail Trail to the Epsom Town Forest on Tarlton Road.** Focus on the Town owned land, improve the existing trails, obtain signage, parking at the Epsom Bible Church is available. Identify the potential connection corridors, then obtain support from user groups and land owners to move forward.

**3) Improve and the existing Town Owned Rail Trail and make a connection to Webster Park to appropriate for walkers and bikers.** Continue to use the Epsom Bible Church as a trailhead and parking area. The section that Town owns could be easiest to pursue.

The group questioned Class VI road potential trail usage and connectivity – Old Swamp Road, Old Mountain Rd into Deerfield, into Bear Brook. Many trails and very little development are located there.

Craig asked whether any connections or possibilities exist for campgrounds to join a SVT network. The two campgrounds, Lazy River Campground and Epsom Valley Campground, are not currently set up for horses, but are large properties and have the room to erect stalls. They would have to be approached to ascertain interest.

Denyce noted the Tiny House cabin rental business next to the Town Forest at Tarlton Road. The cabins are a draw because of the trail system. Glenn noted the nearby microbrewery and agreed the Town Forest area would be a location for potential trails. The group agreed Mountain Road is rough, mountainous, and rideable by horses.

Craig requested that if anyone has GPSed trails in Epsom, he would welcome their inclusion onto the **SVT Working Map**. Moving forward on any project would require the exact location of trails being used, so it would become possible to identify the location of potential connections and the landowners to be contacted. He explained how a GPS trails layers would be helpful to identify where people are using trails. He intends to review

the online Strava fitness heat map that displays where people who have logged in are going, enabling a potential trails layer to add to the maps.

Debbie said Towns could be encouraged to place trails on zoning maps. The purpose would be to identify the landowners and obtain permissions to use trails, as well as try to get trails protected when possible.

A comment was made about it would be nice for trails to cross the state. Craig mentioned the many rail trail initiatives and other initiatives for local and regional trails and trail connections. These initiatives include the Granite State Rail Trail from Salem to Lebanon, the Goffstown/New Boston Rail Trail, the Winnepesaukee and WOW trails, the Rockingham Rec Trail and Freemont Branch Trail, the NH Seacoast Greenway, and others which all connect in New Hampshire.

The group questioned whether it would be possible to establish a trails corridor from Barnstead to Pembroke, following the Suncook Valley Railroad corridor. There is very interesting history here, including the Blueberry Express train that carried blueberries and milk and brought tourists to Wolfeboro, all part of the history of the Suncook Valley.

It was noted that housing was placed on some sections of the former railbed. Backyards were built and the former rail is no longer accessible.

Debbie said when a rail trail project is being considered, to recall that horses cannot walk on a paved railbed, being too slippery, hard on the horses' legs, other users are too fast and spook the horses, etc. She suggested placing an unpaved path next to a paved railbed, situating the two paths next to one another. Barb said as a property owner she would not want pavement. Craig agreed pavement may be more relevant for schools and urban paths, and Glenn said hard pack would be sufficient. There was a general concurrence horses need a loop trail away from Route 4.

Barb noted eagles are nesting along the Suncook River at Goboro Road. Glenn said he would contact Eric Orff for ideas on how to work around the eagles. Stephanie will obtain his email address and include him in the SVT communications.

Craig said the content of the Suncook Valley Trails Plan and the community trails projects is based on the feedback CNHRPC receives, but implementation can only be done by who shows up and who wants to work on projects. Further discussions on specific projects should include trail surfaces and trails uses at different locations.

Stephanie said our next steps will be posting the Epsom Meeting Summary online and holding meetings with the other 4 towns (Allenstown, Chichester, Pembroke, Pittsfield) within next 5 weeks. She invited people to fill out the Trails Experiences Questionnaires to provide more input. Everyone was thanked for attending, and Glenn and Denyce were thanked for hosting the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 7:56.

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