

SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS MEETING

Town of Chichester

May 1, 2019 | 6:00 PM, Chichester Grange/Town Hall Upstairs Meeting Room | 54 Main Street

Meeting Summary

In attendance: **Robert Mann**, Chichester Conservation Commission (walk/bike), **Tom Jameson**, Chichester Planning Board, Parks and Recreation, **Zach Boyajian**, Chichester Parks and Recreation and Conservation Commission (walk/all season/recreation and conservation), **Kevin Gagne**, Chichester Resident & NH Trail Dawgs Trails Administrator (snowmobile, bike path), **Nicholas (Nick) Wood**, Chichester Resident & Bee Hole Beavers (trails improvement, multi-use, ATV, snowmobile). CNHRPC Staff **Craig Tufts** and **Stephanie Alexander**.

Craig (CNHRPC) led introductions and asked everyone to describe their interest in Chichester trails. He said people see trails as an economic development opportunity. We are asking trails groups what types of trails they would like to see in Town, what are the issues, and have them identify trails locations and potential connections on the map. The former Suncook Valley rail corridors – from Pembroke to Hooksett (Heads Pond) is one rail line, and from Allenstown to Barnstead is the old Blueberry Express rail line – have reverted to private property owners or were used by the State for NH 28. New ideas for other rail projects in the state like the Northern Rail Trail and the Concord to Lake Sunapee Rail Trail undertake efforts to reconnect the former rail trail parcel by parcel, building small pieces of trail. The Concord to Lake Sunapee group started with one man who invited other people to join together a few years ago and the idea took off. If this could occur in the Suncook Valley towns, what type of uses would be preferred and appropriate? CNHRPC is meeting with towns so we can take your ideas and priorities and place them into a consolidated Suncook Valley Trails Plan.

Craig initiated the group **discussion regarding existing and potential trails in Chichester** using the Chichester SVT Map of the study area. He said the Main Street area trails were identified by both the Epsom and Pittsfield group discussions and may be an area of interest to Chichester. He also wanted to talk about rail trail ideas and how the Depot Street area might connect in Town and regionally.

Kevin (Chichester) of the NH Trail Dawgs Snowmobile Club reported the Depot Street / Goboro Road suspension bridge is part of snowmobile Corridor 360. The Dawgs are trying to reroute trails to cross into the new campground. Two landowners on Main Street ban all trail use except for snowmobiles.

Bob (Chichester) of the Conservation Commission asked about the Bee Hole Beavers (BHB) Snowmobile Club status. Kevin said its directors are not currently active. Kevin performed grant construction work for the club, but is BHB not participating. He is trying to complete their project and obtain permission from landowners because no one from the club is responding, but is still hoping for collaboration before the project's end.

Tom (Chichester) of Parks and Recreation said many Chichester trails are permitted only for snowmobile use and not cross-country skiing by owners, but this rationale doesn't make sense. Kevin said new trails should be for

designed for multi-use and for all season use (hiking and bicycling). As an example of how limited the trail uses are, on Pound Road Zach (Chichester) of Parks and Recreation said one landowner called the police because his wife was jogging on the trail.

Tom showed two maps displaying trails from the Elementary School to Carpenter Park and from Town Hall to the Library; these are projects of the Parks and Recreation Department. The landowner has a well-defined trail on an old powerline through the woods to Corbin Park near the salt shed. He said Doug Hall GPS'd trails included on the Town Carpenter Park Trails Map, which includes the trail around the school.

Nick (Chichester) said the Town-owned Sanborn-Cray Conservation Land trail at Marsh Pond around the bog is dangerous for walkers, snowmobilers and equestrians, and the group agreed. Kevin said rerouting the trail is being considered for the potential RTP grant. The water and bog section is all on Town land, although landowners in the past have denied entry from the parcels surrounding. Kevin displayed a trail around Hess and indicated locations where owners restricted its use. A new, reroute trail cuts down to the Marsh Pond, add new bridge and abutments, continue trail around the Pond, raise the trail up from the bog area. Zach said the Parks and Rec were trying to do this for several years. Kevin said Cons Comm had always dreamed of having a trail around Marsh Pond with RTP funding and this could now be possible. The group was agreeable. Tom noted the beaver dam broke at least twice, so the bridge is vulnerable to being washed out.

Zach said the NH Department of Environmental Services (DES) Dams Bureau sent the landowner and campground a dam maintenance letter with the directive to repair or remove the dam. The landowner applied for a wetlands permit to remove the dam, but the Wetlands Bureau refused to give the Town a permit. As a result, the Town removed as much of the dam as they could, and the landowner did the same on their side. Then, the Dam Bureau sent a letter to both owners stating the dam is now in ruins. Kevin however said the existing beaver dam is immense. Zach said the Town will have to be cautious from regulatory or risk standpoint related to the dam from here on out, including in an RTP grant application.

Tom said Doug Hall (Chichester resident) was struggling to get landowner permission to use their trails and had been working on this since 2015. He asked Craig what could be done; Craig listed options for consideration, including handshake agreements, written agreements that expire, specific forms identifying uses, permanent easements, and more. Zach preferred the agreements where owners could use check boxes as to their exact preferences for trails use on their properties. **Craig said the Concord to Lake Sunapee Rail Trail group has these types of agreements and he will provide some examples to the Parks and Rec Department.**

The Town has had a long goal of linking its public lands and walking paths with snowmobile trails. **Several existing municipal trails were identified in Chichester on Town or school land.**

- 1) Carpenter Park** - The existing 0.5 mile loop stone dust trail around the Carpenter Park perimeter is situated around a playground and community park between Bear Hill Road, Carpenter Road, and NH 28. A public parking area is situated on the park. The trail uses are walking and biking, but a separate snowmobile trail extends from the Park east to cross Bear Hill Road. Crossing Bear Hill Road, hikers can

continue the Carpenter Park Forest Trail as a second 0.5 mile loop, dirt surface trail on the land behind the Highway Department.

- 2) **Marsh Pond Loop Trail** – Group discussed the trail needs improvement, marshy areas with boardwalks sinking. Currently constructed for hikers and walkers, dangerous for snowmobile riders. (Details below)
- 3) **Chichester Elementary School to Town Library** – a short, paved walkway for children and families to be used for walking and bicycling.

Some of these trails are isolated but others hold potential for connection into a wider trail system. They were discussed in the context of connection and enhancement for future projects as indicated below.

The following areas were designated as the best or first priority trails opportunities to pursue in Chichester:

1) Main Street Corridor Community Trail System (approximate area of Horse Corner Road/Center Road, to Bear Hill Road and NH 28, south down Main Street and Cross Road, then connecting from Lane Road back to Horse Corner). This area contains several ideas for future trails consideration, as described above, to connect to or improve existing municipal trails and snowmobile trails. Overall coordinated project: Snowmobile trails cross the private lands and through some town properties within this area, and multiple local Town trails offer hiking located on Town land in isolated loops. There is a potential for a connected, coordinated trail system in this area, summer hiking/bicycling use and snowmobile/cross country skiing winter use. A Trails Committee comprised on the Parks and Rec members, snowmobile club members, and other interested people could work to accomplish this goal. The location of kiosks and parking areas should also be considered while upgrading trails.

1A) Marsh Pond behind the Fire Station. Existing Town hiking and biking trail around Marsh Pond was noted as is swampy and not effective for use. The group indicated a potential partnership between the Parks and Rec Department and the NH Trail Dawgs to potentially raise and improve the trail surface, fix the bridges across the section, and enable snowmobiles for winter use while summer use would be for hikers and bikers. Multiple trail connections could be constructed to reach existing snowmobile trails. Dams are also a problem. The group discussed the opportunities for applying for an RTP grant for some of these trail ideas and talking to the owners of the new Hillcrest Campground to ascertain their interest in a trail connection through their property.

1B) Depot Street connection to Thunder Bridge and Suncook Valley Railbed. Possibility for snowmobile use parallel to Depot Road and may have trail connection potential. Historic Thunder Bridge across the Suncook River near Depot Street/Goboro Road is on the National Register of Historic Places. It may be possible the bridge could be crossed to access the railroad bed in Epsom, connecting to the Epsom town-owned railroad section. Heading north, the railbed heads into Pittsfield. A Chichester Main Street/ NH 28 intersection improvement will be underway in several years, so developing a plan for potential trails usage of this area now is appropriate. It may be possible for some future consideration or work completed under this intersection improvement.

1C) South of Carpenter Park to the Chichester Elementary School is a prime location to construct a trail connection. Kevin said grant in aid could be bolstered by the NH Trail Dawgs Club as a multi-collaborative effort.

Craig said since the Main Street Corridor would be a prime area to establish trails, then discussion should be had about connections to railroad bed. Kevin said snowmobilers and hikers would like official access to the railbed.

It was noted the farmer landowners are fine with winter use but do not want summer use since the fields are being used. Craig said we can map any GPS trails we obtain from the group via to place on the Chichester Suncook Valley Trails Maps and provide them as to help the town with future trails planning. Craig asked Kevin for a GIS shape file layer of the NH Trail Dawgs snowmobile trail.

The group reviewed the sections of the potentially usable former SV railbed beginning in Epsom from the Traffic Circle, but most sections will need to be bypassed to reach the railbed. Incorporating the crossing of Thunder Bridge on Depot Road would add to the experience. The group indicated the area of bypass on the map.

Regarding the Library to School Trail, Zach said Parks and Rec offered to place a parking lot at the end of Class VI Pound Road for trailhead, were refused by the landowners because of alleged garbage dumping and drug usage. Now the Parks and Rec is trying to establish a small parking at the Church next door for just a few cars which may be more feasible.

Bob asked to have Recreational Trails Program grant summarized. Craig said the grant was 20/80 and provided a brief outline. Zach said the perimeter of Carpenter Park off NH 28 had been funded by RTP. Regarding Marsh Pond, the group agreed the boardwalk would be costly. Kevin reported a May 13 workshop for RTP applicants from 1-3 and 6-8 at NH DANCR Bureau of Trails, 172 Pembroke Road in Concord. The group was very interested; Zach said he would attend on behalf of Chichester and Craig plans to attend. Kevin said no equipment category is in the grant for this year.

Stephanie said she would recirculate the RTP meeting info as emailed by Kevin to her to the attending Chichester Trails Meeting attendees. The Town was enthusiastic about attending and applying for at least one RTP grant.

Some land owners only prefer friends and neighbors unless permission is granted or rerouted around. Nick said in the North Country, the technique they use to obtain landowner permission is to find out what the landowner wants. A trade can be arranged (a lawn expansion, for example), and the club or Town can obtain get a trail for life if the right fit is found. This is how the successful trail system in northern NH was built. Regarding overall landowner permissions, Kevin said he can work with landowners and see who might be willing to provide agreement. Nick offered the use of his equipment to help build trails whenever the group wants.

Around the Chichester SVT Map, Craig reviewed the locations of the Epsom and Pittsfield group discussion preferences. Pittsfield has a bike/ped project in the Town Center with some brownfield redevelopment, then snowmobiles into Barnstead. Kevin and Nick said they will talk to the Suncook Valley Sno-Riders Club to see what could work. With the good shape the former railbed is in, it could have potential to be a future

snowmobile corridor trail. Craig described other options in Epsom. For Allenstown, Kevin thought a trail parallel to NH 28 could work. Craig suggested if a northern link could be built and the Pembroke-Allenstown link could be built, then there would have a good case for building a trail north-south from Epsom to Allenstown.

Craig said Allenstown will use the trails discussion as economic development considerations, probably around Bear Brook and Suncook Village. Zach noted that the area of Old Chester Turnpike to the back corner of Bear Brook north of Hooksett, (Manchester Sand and Gravel), people and trails use are not permitted in the area. Nick noted they removed a few railroad crossings to let the water through.

In Epsom, When the railbed reverted to landowners, new homes were built along Goboro Road where the railbed one lay. One of their priorities was to safe way to cross US 4/202 while circumventing the avulsion, and improve the trail with stone dust (Bear Brook is primary Corridor 360 that connects to Corridor 15).

Craig said if the Suncook Valley corridor section can be developed into a continuous rail trail, there would be strong possibilities of future connection down route 28 to connect to the Salem-Concord Bikeway at Allenstown/Pembroke and up to the Northern Rail Trail.

Bob asked what permissions the Town or clubs would need from a landowner if we wanted to pursue the line from line from Epsom to Pittsfield? Craig said the goal of a rail trail is a permanent easement in long term. But there are intermittent steps between a handshake agreement and what snowmobile clubs have been doing, to a signed easement with the Town and the trail placed onto a map for public distribution. Bob asked whether the RPT requires permanent easement? Craig said no, but there is a risk if the landowner sells their property, in which case their agreement would be invalid. Tom added that the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) grants that his department administers require a long-term, permanent easement with a trails designation. Kevin said one option could be to convert Town Class VI road to a Class A trail. Stephanie said Class VI conversion to Class A requires a Town Meeting vote. Tom said that Town are not permitted to spend money on Class VI roads, but a Class A designation would solve this issue. **Craig said we could develop a current Class A/B Municipal Trail factsheet as part of the Suncook Valley Trails Plan project.**

The following areas outside the Suncook Valley Rail Corridor were identified as potential trail connections to pursue in Chichester and beyond:

1) Class VI Pound Road over Center Road toward Town owned land and water body and toward Loudon.

The existing Snowmobile corridor near Bee Hole Beavers (heading toward Loudon) is located in this vicinity. Connecting from the Town Class VI road, agreements could be made with property owners for summer hiking and bicycling use. A Town Trails Committee could approach jointly to request winter snowmobile/cross country skiing use using a simple landowner agreement. Most of the snowmobile trails were noted to have been closed near the town line. The corridor trail needs to be rerouted through Suncook River area to Corridor 15.

2) Spaulding Town Forest narrowly fronts on Hutchinson Road just south of Short Falls Road at the Epsom town line.

A section of trail from Lane Road to Carpenter Park was under development a few years ago. This Town property was identified to have potential for trail connection using nearby Class VI

roads such as Leavitt Road, and the possibility of using snowmobile trails to connect north to the Marsh Pond Trails. The Forest contains interesting destinations, such as caves and a possible observation point with platform. Parking area with kiosks may have to be considered further in because the current neighbor resists parking on their property. This is a good project for a Trails Committee to undertake, as it could connect to the Main Street Community Trail System.

3) North of Bear Hill Road, south of Hilliard Road and west of NH 28. Possible snowmobile connection between the northern end of Carpenter Park and the town own land off south of Hilliard Road.

Tom said the Town had a problem with motorcycles during a charity event driving up Class VI roads, and as a result, landowners have become scared of motorized vehicles. No ATVs/OHRVs are legal on the Town roads because the Selectmen have not permitted their use. A precedent may be Old Davis Road, which had been a Class VI road in the past, and the Town gave the road to the landowner because of multiple concerns.

Bob noted the local confusion over ATVs, although they need specific permission, they are all over the place. They have become a major issue when talking to landowners about use agreements. People are putting up gates. Zach said the Town has a policy that landowner must have provided written permission for OHRVs on their property, which the OHRV operator must carry on them, or else the conservation officer can ticket them. Tom added landowner are mad because ATVers have cut the chains restricting them from the trails on private property. The group discussed the need for a variety of fact sheets to be made available to landowners, including liability. The Bureau of Trails can provide signs to landowners signs for no cost.

Craig related an example from Henniker, where a Town OHRV club was formed and local ATV use was working fine. The problem was that riders from out of town came to Henniker to use the trails and they were not following the established rules, so as a result, the OHRV club gets blamed. Kevin said snowmobile trails are closed by landowners because of ATV use, so the NH Trail Dawgs has placed cameras and signage to help dissuade their use on snowmobile trails. The NH 28 parking area has lots of signs for snowmobiles which have permissions for connecting and crossing over, with no OHRV parking permitted, but that is what the lot is being used for. The Bureau of Trails petitioned NH Department of Transportation to post the trails and conducted a successful social media campaign. Craig mentioned Trails Bureau gave a presentation to the Epsom Conservation on April 12 on local ATV use.

Zach noted wherever there is an open area posted to ATV use, there will be a large draw. He has noted vehicles from other states parked the trail head lots. Tom mentioned Manchester has had problems with ATVs on North High Street, and a tunnel will be constructed under this exit area by Madden Road. Nick said Manchester trails were working just fine with ATVs for 30 years until out-of-staters came in and did not follow rules.

Kevin applauded the equestrian partners for their good work done helping build and maintain trails. The group noted lots of local runners, equestrians and stable owners, not necessarily club-based, in Chichester who might be interested in getting involved.

Bob asked how the Suncook Valley Trails Plan would discuss trails. Craig replied we will present the regional vision and goals, using for Chichester trails the idea of the snowmobile corridor open to year-round use,

property owner agreements, and some of the detailed projects the Town wants to work on. A successful trail have permissions, be recognized, publicized and mapped officially. He suggested the group begin to talk to property owners, identifying what types of trails usage is appropriate and where. Tom said this was Doug Hall's goal to encourage trails for passive informal summer hiking but not a formal surface to draw people from far away. The Parks and Rec Department wants to get local people out into the outdoors. A short trail between Carpenter Park and the Elementary School is appropriate be more formal and paved because of its users.

Craig said Loudon, Bow and other towns have monthly meetings of their Trails Committees to enable collaboration of different groups, to get trails projects done, and to publicize and map the trails. Henniker began a Trails Committee last year; their situation was different as they were starting with existing trails without formal permission and are now seeking permission for mapping & publicizing. The group agreed the Carpenter Park Trail is newly built and very popular, was a success endeavor.

Zach said the property owner near Marsh Pond currently denies permission for maintaining the existing trail during the summer. Bob said sometimes landowners have heard horror stories and many people must feel the same in the region. He hopes the SVT Plan will address how people can feel comfortable for signing an agreement for trails use on their property, perhaps adding guidelines and resources.

Craig offered to revisit the Town to determine a detailed plan on some of these potential projects. He would plan to bring brochures on liability, fact sheets on trails, and copies of the State statutes governing trails. Nick noted when landowners sign agreement through an official snowmobile club, the landowners pays no court fees in the event of being sued for liability- the entire case goes to the State instead. The State has insurance for the clubs, for which they pay. Tom said laws exist to protect the landowner, and people whose lands are in current use under the recreation benefit automatically permit people to use their land. He asked if CNHRPC could map the designated current use recreation parcels to help with the Town's trails planning and inquired where that data might exist. Stephanie suggested reviewing the NH Department of Revenue Administration for up to date information on current use laws, then suggested reviewing the Town's MS-1 or MS-7 forms. The assessing data might contain the recreation designation. The group will investigate the current use recreation data and will provide it to Craig to add the properties to the Chichester SVT Map.

Stephanie explained the wrap up of the Suncook Valley Trails Plan project. CNHRPC will submit the draft document within the next couple of weeks to the NH Department of Transportation. We will be scheduling a final meeting to review the draft Plan with the five communities; this will be another opportunity for changes before the Plan is finalized. Tom asked about future trails meetings in Chichester. Craig suggested the Parks and Rec Department can organize a meeting and CNHRPC can attend and help advise and prepare maps, etc.

The meeting adjourned at 7:40.

Meeting Summary by Stephanie Alexander, CNHRPC | 603.226.6020 | salexander@cnhrpc.org

Follow up item 05-03- Kevin Gagne sent through Stephanie an email with the RTP 2020 application information, which she emailed to the Chichester meeting attendees. He also reported he viewed the historic Thunder Bridge on Depot Street and spoke with Bruce Blye of the Epsom Fort Mountain Trailwinders Snowmobile Club. Bruce is familiar with the old rail bed and

the owners. There used to be a snowmobile trail which utilized the old rail bed, but the property owners currently deny access. Kevin suggested sending letters to those affected requesting reopening to foot and bike traffic.