



South Hadley Bike/Walk Committee

southhadleyma.gov/bikewalk

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South Hadley Bike/Walk Committee (BWC) Minutes

June 20, 2018 | South Hadley Public Library

Present: Mariann Millard (Chair), Nancy Bozek, Melissa O'Brien, Lucia Foley, Marilyn Gass, Margaret Jodoin, Huguette Supinski

Absent: M.P. Chevrette (Chevy)

Guests: Doris Dubois, Jim Menard (Water District 2 Prudential Committee); Pete Michaels (DCR); Paul Gagnon (Kestrel Land Trust); Mike Sullivan (S.H. Town Administrator); Mary Beth O'Meara, Barbara Smith, Dennis Rochon (Property Owners)

Minutes of the May 16, 2018 meeting were reviewed and unanimously approved by members present.

Lithia Springs Reservoir Access Project (continued conversation)

BWC Chair Mariann Millard began with introductions, noting the meeting is a follow-up to two previous fact-finding sessions convened with stakeholders with a goal of identifying direct, legal, and safe access to Lithia Springs that will not impinge on private property, preferably directly from the 'Hiker Parking' lot on Route 116. Hikers are not clear about where to go, and the preferred route to Lithia Springs is both unsafe and circuitous ('Hiker Parking' users are meant to walk south on Route 116 to Pearl Street, and then down Lithia Springs Road).

Pete Michaels (DCR) reviewed existing trails and potential routes to Lithia Springs using MassGIS:

- Orange Trail—from the Notch Visitors Center (approx. 2 miles)
- Blue Route—a 'test' route that runs to the east of Mary Beth O'Meara's property (Lot 11 and Lot 4 dogleg) and then crosses back over a narrow bit of her property to avoid a hill. Several routes converge in this area, including the Red and Orange Routes, which also go around the hill and close to—if not on, her property.
- Yellow (blazed) Trail—from Skinner State Park (access from Mountain Road), which also appears to cross O'Meara property (approx. 3 miles from Mountain Road over arduous, elevated terrain); the trail overlay on the map may not be completely accurate.
- Red Trail—runs along the west edge of the O'Meara property (approx. 1.04 miles, access from Lithia Springs Road)
- The Red-Yellow-Orange Trails are all currently open to the public, and actually function as one trail.

Pete noted that the Lithia Springs Road area has always been problematic as a congregating point for drugs and other activity. Though gates installed by DCR have reduced ATV issues, quality-of-life and safety issues persist for residents of Lithia Springs Road. A sandpit to the left at the end of Lithia Springs Road that might possibly serve as a parking area also has the potential to attract additional people to the road.

Possible alternate access options:

- Pearl Street Access—an entry drive to a new parking and trail access might be possible, though this might be precluded by potential habitat and neighbor concerns. Hikers would not be able to park on Pearl Street.
- Blue Route—Pete's new 'test' route (walked by a group that included BWC members) is somewhat longer and has more hills, but mostly goes around O'Meara property except for a narrow bit around a difficult hill before hooking up with the established Red Trail. The route also crosses a stream behind an existing pump house; as the water can

be running fast and deep, a bridge would likely be needed. Pete notes that a new footpath along the Blue Route would require signoff from both Conservation and Natural Heritage (NHESP).

- Water District 2 Access—seek more direct access to the Blue Route from the Hiker Parking lot across District 2 land.

Mary Beth expressed concern about liability and worried that even if private property is posted an owner might still be liable. Pete noted that where signs are removed from posted property, owners can cover themselves by taking a photo of the posted sign, which provides dated documentation. Paul (Kestrel) said MGL Ch. 21 provides liability protection for landowners who open land to recreation, so she might elect not to post that area. Lucia asked Mary Beth if she had ever considered donating the piece of land where people are likely to stray so she would not have this concern. Mariann suggested an educational kiosk memorializing the family and its history in the area might be a possible outcome should some of the land were to be donated.

Options for moving forward:

- Explore rerouting options around Lot 4, where trails intersect.
- Land on the far edge of the O’Meara property might be considered for possible donation to Kestrel to avoid liability issues; an easement might also be explored.
- Work with Water District 2 on a right of way access/easement; identify safety concerns such as a well that might need to be filled and a gate in the pump house building for a dam.
- Identify funding sources for a stream bridge (Paul believes Rec. Trails or other funding might be available)
- DCR can do a property boundaries survey for free.
- DCR will start with a basic trail route concept and bring that in.
- Pete noted that the process must go through Fish & Wildlife.

Mary Beth stated the family doesn’t want people on their property so it will be posted, cameras will be installed, and they will prosecute. Pete said that DCR has only had 3-4 enforcement issues in 12 years; most instances concern lost hikers or interactions with wildlife, which are becoming increasingly common.

Mariann said that the goal is to create a trail that doesn’t send people onto Lithia Springs Road and asked Mike what assistance the Town might be able to offer. Mike stated that the Town has limited involvement, as it does not own any of the land. The Town is currently involved with three complex trail projects (Canal Park, Leaping Well Nature Trail, River to Range Trail), and Mike believes there is limited capacity both financially and among Town staff to take on something new at this time. Mariann said that BWC will need to engage with DCR and other stakeholders to move forward. Mike responded that as a Town Committee, while we can’t have direct responsibility or apply for grants—which only the Selectboard can accept, he believes it is within our purview to engage in advocacy. Mariann thanked Mike for clear guidance on the Town’s position as well as BWC’s, and noted that BWC must work under the auspices of the Town and can’t proceed with a grant process, but we can continue to do research, engage, and work to map out a strategy for moving forward.

Areas of agreement and game plan:

Private property owners would ideally like no parking Lithia Springs Road, no Hiker Parking lot, and access to Lithia Springs trails from the Notch only. Everyone agrees that the Hiker Parking lot and access for hikers require a solution.

- Q: If a new trail should happen, is the Town willing to close Lithia Springs Road to parking?
A: Enforcement is an issue; the Town can’t give out tickets or tow cars at present.
- IF: DCR and O’Meara property owners come to an agreement, the DCR gate could be moved up to prevent parking on Lithia Springs Road. Kestrel would need to own/acquire land.

Paul suggested continuing the discussion and talking to other groups to see what can happen in that Town involvement will be limited. Mary Beth said that if a trail is created and properly marked with appropriate signage, that could be OK.

In response to a question from Mariann as to whether this sounded feasible to him, Mike responded, "This is not Town property. We're not part of this, none of this is our land. But Bike-Walk is an advocacy group and you are individuals who can bring people together."

Mariann will follow-up with Ken and others for Water District 2 after the meeting.

Other Business

Huguette showed samples of the orange armbands she has been working on for BWC members to wear during Treks and other activities so everyone can be readily identified by event participants. The bands will have Velcro closures so they are adjustable, and will be ready for the first Trek in September. She will make a total of 10 bands, and anticipates a cost of \$3 each for materials, plus labor.

Announcements

The dedication for the Phase 1 of the River to Range Trail is scheduled for Wednesday, June 27 at 11:00am.

The ValleyBike regional bike share program launch is scheduled for June 28 at 11:00am at Pulaski Park in Northampton. BWC members are invited to both events.

Work on the Leaping Well Nature Trail will be starting shortly on the bog bridges, parking area, and the route, with an estimated opening in October.

Canal Walk trail work is in progress.

Bike lanes will be coming on Route 116 when the road is paved.

NEXT MEETING:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05pm. The next meeting will be held at 7:00pm on Wednesday, July 18, 2018 at the South Hadley Public Library.

Respectfully submitted,
Lucia Foley