

Trails Committee Minutes

March 29, 2011 – 3:00 p.m.

Present: Chairman Kinowski; Supervisors Veitch, Wright and Richardson; Jason Kemper, Planning; Devin DalPos, Saratoga Springs; Larry Gordon, Gansevoort; Press.

Chairman Kinowski called the meeting to order and welcomed all in attendance.

Chairman Kinowski announced the appointment of Matt Veitch as Vice Chairman of the Trails Committee.

Mr. Kemper said the Planning Department prepared, at the request of the County Administrator, parcel by parcel all of the county forest lands and went out where there were existing trails and put them on GPS. There is now a book that has been completed, entitled “The Reforested Lands of Saratoga County” with each parcel including a tax parcel map, general location map, arial photo, and if there are trails on the land there is another map included. All of this has also been digitized, he said.

Mr. Kinowski asked Mr. Kemper to email the contents of the book to each supervisor for their review. For those who do not have the electronic capability copies will be made and sent to them. This really highlights everything that you would want to know and questions you would want to ask, but you don’t have to because they are available in the book, he said.

Mr. Kemper said the ribbon cutting for the opening of the Zim Smith trail took place in the fall. The most use on the trail this winter was by the snowmobile clubs and there were very few complaints through the winter. He said after inspecting the trail from Oak Street to Coons Crossing there were no washouts or major issues to report, and the snowmobile club is in the process of removing their signage. He said there would be some plantings done and fixing of some drainage issues on the oak street section of the trail, which will be completed in the spring

Mr. Kinowski said when a complaint should arise he has no problem with any supervisor who has trails in their area, emailing him directly. He said either he or Mr. Kemper will make sure the issue is addressed.

Mr. Kemper distributed copies of maps of the three county parcels, including the Loudon Road Trail, Kalabus-Perry Trail, and the Edie Road Trail, and thanked Mr. Gordon for all his help. He stated that all the trails are now signed and open for business. These were the three main county forest projects last year, and with the help of BOCES, Mr. Gordon’s groups and County forces all three parcels were opened, he said.

Mr. Kemper said that next week approximately 200 acres of land will be harvested in the town of Moreau.

Mr. Kinowski asked how the funding of projects like this would be handled? Mr. Kemper said in the past they have had groups that have helped out and when they couldn't help there were county resources that were devoted to the project. During budget negotiations there were lengthy discussions with the Department of Public Works for their assistance. For the most part it has been volunteer work, he said.

Mr. Veitch said there is an agreement with the Department of Public Works to do maintenance within their budget this year for all of the county trails. At the last Trails meeting, a budget was formed as to what it would cost to hire someone to do the work, and once they saw that they realized that it was well within their own budget to do the work with existing staff.

Mr. Kinowski said what Mr. Veitch has done to accelerate the committee into overdrive, and creating something that supports economic development and assistance in each and every town, is to be commended.

Mr. Kinowski asked Mr. Kemper to put together a short statement of what is available by virtue of the work of the Trails Committee to the Saratoga County Supervisors for Economic Development, so they will know what is available to their residents.

Mr. Kinowski gave the following update on Spruce Mountain as follows: He said the county does not own the tower on the mountain, and there is radio equipment on it that is no longer needed. Before the county can startup the new radio system this equipment will have to be removed. This equipment was; however, included as part of the appraisal. Once the equipment goes away, that appraisal will likely be greatly reduced, he said. Mr. Kinowski said what concerns him is that even though the bottom stairs on the tower have been removed, people are still climbing the tower. There are a number of groups out there that would like to renovate the tower, and he suggested that the issue be addressed as to whether the county really needs to keep that piece of land. He asked that committee members discuss the issue with others to determine what is the need for keeping the land. He said that right now the land is landlocked with a tower on it that the county is not going to use, presenting a potential liability for the county.

Mr. Richardson asked how much acreage there was? Mr. Kemper said the land the tower is on is less than a couple of acres. Mr. Wright asked who owns the tower? Mr. Kemper said the State owns the tower that was built in 1928. He said this has become an issue at every public trails meeting that he attends. Last year the county was moving towards an agreement with DEC that eventually fell through.

Mr. Gordon said he was responsible for putting the purchase together for the county when IP (International Paper) owned the land and the TV Company moved off the mountain. There was a distinct boundary of IP's land which included three components, the TV station, the leasehold of DEC, and the IP property which is an acre or two at most

where the county has fragmented pieces of their communication system. When the property was purchased, IP was very quick to want to get rid of it because when their contract ran out with the TV Company they were then responsible for all the school taxes. Since the county doesn't pay taxes, they purchased the land from IP for approximately \$20,000, which included the TV station.

Mr. Richardson asked if the county could get rid of a piece of property where the tower is owned by someone else? Mr. Kemper said there are two towers on Spruce Mountain, a full radio tower, which has to come down, and a Fire Tower, which is currently owned by DEC.

Mr. Gordon said the same procedure of this leased tower is exactly the same that existed in many places in the state, including Luther Forest, where the state had the lease and owned the tower. The Conservation Department then requested OGS; the owner of all property for the State, to declare it's surplus to get out of the liability. DEC sold it at auction to a private individual for a negotiated \$1, and then Luther Forest Corporation took it over. This same process would apply to Spruce Mountain, he said.

Mr. Kemper said Spruce Mountain is becoming a very big destination, with approximately 20,000 visitors recorded on the mountain last year.

The committee agreed to forward the issue to the county's law and finance committee for their consideration and recommendation for what to do next.

Mr. Kinowski said if after review from the Law and Finance Committee the county doesn't own the land anymore, should the Trails Committee make it an initiative to have the trail marked on the country trail system? Mr. Kemper said absolutely, this trail has the potential to attract thousands of people.

Mr. Kemper distributed a copy of a map of the Saratoga County Snowmobile Trails. He said there are currently nine different snowmobile clubs in the county. The county registers snowmobiles, and as part of the registration there is a trail users fee. Each year there is a maximum of \$89,000 in snowmobile grants and that is equally distributed back to the snowmobile clubs in the county based on the number of miles of trails that they have. The money is used for grooming, maintenance, and gas to help them maintain the trails. It is the responsibility of each club to go out to the individual owners and get permission to use the trails on their property, and submit a certificate of insurance to the owner, along with a copy to be retained by the county. The County Planning Board acts to oversee the whole county to make sure that everyone has permission to be on the land they are on and has insurance. There are 165 miles of snowmobile trails in the county as of this year, he said. This is a major player in the county especially when you look into the town of Greenfield and Corinth in the wintertime. The economic activity that is generated by snowmobiles is very significant especially in the rural towns.

Mr. Richardson said the Historic Saratoga/Washington county partnership is fixing the Dix Bridge. A grant was received for \$2.4 million and the county put up front the 20% to

get the job taken care of. The snowmobile clubs donated \$4,000 recently to help offset the cost to the county.

Mr. Richardson said the railroads are being put back into the Mechanicville rail yard. Mrs. Wormuth has discussed this with the railroads and they gave the county a five-year window to have the plans ready for the Zim Smith Trail to come down along the rail yard to the center of Mechanicville where the dock is. Work is being done to bring the canal trails from Waterford to Whitehall and that will come right up the main street of Mechanicville past the dock area, so they will intersect at the Mechanicville dock, which will be a tremendous value for the City of Mechanicville and a great value for the rest of the county, connecting the Champlain Canal way to the Zim Smith Trail.

Mr. Kemper said the Zim Smith Trail currently ends at Coons Crossing, which is currently a dead end trail. Two years ago when the railroad announced their expansion, as part of their review under NEPA and the State Quality Review Act, Mr. Richardson and Mrs. Wormuth became heavily involved in those discussions. The town of Halfmoon required that the railroad provide the county the ability to extend the Zim Smith Trail down through the railroad and eventually connect into the City of Mechanicville. The railroad agreed to that and gave the county a five-year option. The county has to show progress within those five years. If the county does not show progress then that land will be reverted back to Saratoga PLAN. Saratoga PLAN was the mediary because the county did not want to acquire the land, so they stepped up to the plate and that option was given to Saratoga PLAN. Saratoga PLAN, on their own, with approval from the County, obtained approval for a \$250,000 member item from Assemblyman Reilly in order to acquire some additional right of way to make the trail happen. This member item is in jeopardy of disappearing if action isn't taken quickly, he said. Mr. Kemper said there is money that is left in the capital account for the Zim Smith. The county needs to decide if they are going to move forward with the project and how they are going to do that. Last year, Greenman-Peterson provided a quick feasibility study. Mr. Kemper said he would get copies of that to all of the committee members.

Mr. Kinowski said he would meet with Mr. Kemper and Saratoga PLAN to brainstorm the idea and then distribute it to the committee members to let them know where it could potentially go, and the potential costs associated with it. Mr. Kinowski said he would be in touch with Ms. Daly, Chairman of the Economic Development Committee.

Mr. Kinowski asked Mr. Kemper when he thought all the mapping would be available on the county website? Mr. Kemper said all the PDF's are up now. By the end of May all the information regarding the county trails will be available on the county website. Mr. Kemper said you will be able to click on a section of trail and see what the surface is, what town it is in, whose responsibility it is and what uses are allowed on that section of the trail.

Mr. Kinowski said the issue of utility of Trail mapping for other agencies was brought up at an emergency management meeting in his town. With all the people that are using the trails, if someone got injured on the trail, how do the emergency rescue people find them

without a map? The fact that this will exist digitally, and they can have it readily accessible at the emergency management sites just by coming by Saratoga County could potentially locate an injured person out on the trail.

Mr. Wright said there was an initiative at one time that was being pushed by snowmobile clubs to give intersections on main roads a 911 number. He suggested a 911 number for trails that cross main roads. Mr. Kinowski said he thought it was a great idea and he would speak to Mr. Lent about it.

Mr. Kinowski asked if a town creates it's own trail, do we want to make it incumbent upon the county that if the town recommends it to the Trails Committee that it be place on the map? Mr. Kemper said Mr. Hilts, the Planning Department GIS technician, has already been reaching out to all of the supervisors, gathering information, and entering it into the GIS system.

Mr. Gordon introduced Mr. Litchfield, the former President of the Wilton Wildlife and Preserve Park. He said Mr. Litchfield takes care of all the maintenance on all the trails within the Wilton Wildlife Preserve, including all the grooming with his own equipment. He was very helpful in getting all the work done on the plantation on Edie Road as well.

Mr. Gordon distributed an invitation to all committee members to the Dedication Ceremony of the Cornell Hill Fire Tower at Historic Camp Saratoga, which will take place on May 14, 2011 at 10:00 a.m., with a rain date of May 15th.

On a motion made by Mr. Richardson, seconded by Mr. DalPos the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Chris Sansom