

MEETING NOTES

Columbia County TRAILS Roundtable

March 29, 2012, Churchtown Firehouse

Convener: Columbia Land Conservancy (CLC)

- 21 people attended from 11 towns, in addition to Karl Beard, National Park Service, Rivers Trails & Conservation Assistance Program; Beth Campochiaro, Hudson River Valley Greenway; Salim Chishti/New Lebanon, and State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation; Tony Colyer-Pendas and Ellen Jouret-Epstein, CLC.
- Boston & Albany Rail: Approximately 1.5 miles of this County-owner corridor (Rte. 9H to Courts Lane) has been cleared and is open informally. There has been support for doing something to make the corridor available. In the past there has been some opposition from hunters. The comprehensive plan includes language about opening the trail, but there is no formal trail committee at this time.
- Harlem Valley Rail Trail:
 - One current priority is to complete the trail gap north of Millerton where there are wetlands issues.
 - A major focus now will be on raising construction funds, which is a new challenge for the group. Their primary experience has been in smaller local fundraising, advocacy for the trail and publicity.
- Equestrian Land Conservation Fund: The purpose is to conserve land including farmland that can be opened for equestrian use. There is interest in the Capitol District to develop these opportunities. The area extends northward to Saratoga County and is heavily represented up there. Columbia County is behind in getting landowner support for this. A guidebook is available, "Equestrian Design Guidebook for Trails, Trailheads, and Campgrounds" a USDA publication available free of charge in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration.
- Chatham Hunt Club:
 - The Club has close relationships with approximately 200 landowners who participate in opening their lands to club members.
 - The Club maintains all trails. Trails are "rustic." Some landowners have asked to be named on the Club's insurance policy.
 - Trails are open to Club members only, except for monthly trail rides made available at a modest cost; and for equestrian use only, except for special events for walkers.
 - They are always looking for other trail opportunities for equestrian use.
- Snowmobilers:

- Snowmobiling can be a good shared use as there is less trail impact from it than from other uses due to the snow cover. In the north country, multi-use trails are common.
- There are no State-designated snowmobile trails in Columbia County, although you can get on a trail in Rensselaer County and ride to the Canadian border.
- Typically, farmers provide permission on their lands.
- Some local snowmobile trails (not State-designated) are at Bash Bish Falls, Taghkanic State Park, Beebe Hill. But these are not always groomed/maintained.
- The State allocates funds to the State Snowmobile Association, which come from the snowmobile's vehicle registration fees. A big advantage of sharing a trail with the snowmobile groups is the opportunity to share in those revenues as well.
- The Association will cover liability on privately-owned trails.
- The future for snowmobile trails, as well as equestrian trails, will involve land conservation tools.
- Kinderhook Trail; Kinderhook/Stuyvesant/Stockport Intermunicipal Trail:
 - Will utilize an existing National Grid transmission corridor (former electric trolley line route from Hudson to Albany. There is a group in Rensselaer County working on the corridor up there, which can ultimately link from the Columbia County border to the City of Troy.
 - The trail corridor links beautiful countryside, farmland, historic sites, community facilities and village centers from.
 - The group (Friends of Kinderhook Trails) is in final negotiations with National Grid to obtain the licensing agreement that will permit the trail use and allow funding to be used that has already been secured (Transportation Enhancement Program grant through DOT, locally administered federal funds.)
 - The Kinderhook project is planned in three phases, from Niverville south to Kinderhook Village. Greenway funding supported an initial study.
 - The trail is now also part of a three-town intermunicipal trail vision that extends through Stuyvesant and Stockport on the National Grid corridor. Another Greenway grant supported a feasibility study for extending the trail south from the Village of Kinderhook, through Stuyvesant, to Stockport
 - An important link south from the Village of Kinderhook is to the National Park Service Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, part of a spur trail east of the primary trail corridor and east of the Kinderhook Creek.
 - The Columbia County Historical Society has partnered with Friends of Kinderhook Trails to plan and construct the trail section linking the Luykas Van Alen House, through Roxbury Farm, to the Martin Van Buren site. This will link three centuries of Dutch farming!

- The trail vision in this area east of the Kinderhook Creek is made possible in large part by the efforts of the Open Space Institute, with CLC, to secure conservation easements with trail easement provisions on several private parcels of land.
- Stuyvesant: In addition to partnering with Kinderhook and Stockport on the National Grid corridor trail, Stuyvesant has created its own trail group, which has created a nature trail in a town park; worked with NYSDEC to open a section of trail along the Hudson River; and other trail projects.
- Landowner Issues: A big question starting out on trail planning is how to approach and work with private landowners to get “buy-in” and permission/access easements. Good publications are available through Parks & Trails New York, [Parks & Trails New York - Publications](#), including [Getting Started...A Guide to Planning Trails in New York](#) and [Handbook for Landowners](#) among others.
- Germantown: There are a couple of good trail possibilities in Germantown, including a 6-mile vision starting from the Cheviot (on the Hudson) neighborhood, along an old Palatine Road (currently crossing private land). There is another possibility leading up to one of the finest mountain viewpoints in town, which is currently owned by Taconic Farms.
 - Question: Is there any precedent for working with CSX to obtain permission for a trail along the rail line?
 - There are models elsewhere in the country not here. Refer to “Rails with Trails,” [rails-WITH-trails - Trails along active rail lines](#), and the “rails-to-trails conservancy,” [Rails-to-Trails Conservancy: Rails-with-Trails](#)
- Taconic State Parkway?: Is there potential to create a linear trail corridor within the Taconic State Parkway right-of-way? This could be suitable for equestrian or snowmobile uses, among others.
 - There is a precedent on Long Island where there are bicycle trails along a highway. Another is the Lake Ontario State Parkway. A plan for a trail there was done in the 1980's.
- Conclusion:
 - Salim Chishti, OPRHP: Can be a “go between” with NYS Parks for questions, information. There will be a Recreational Trails/Environmental Protection Fund grant round later this year. Watch the OPRHP website for updates: [Grants - NYS Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation](#)
 - Beth Campochiaro, Trails Coordinator, Hudson River Valley Greenway: A general resource for information and help with networking. Also important grant source, and source of information about other available grants. See website: [Grants Overview](#), [Other Funding](#), and sign up for the Greenway newsletter to receive alerts about grant deadlines.

- The Winnakee Land Trust with Greenway and others is sponsoring the first Dutchess County Regional Trails Conference on Saturday, April 21st at the Cornell Boat House, Marist College. Register at the Winnakee website. <http://www.winnakeeland.org/TCPoster.pdf>
- Karl Beard, Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program/National Park Service: Now that we have a start with the county trail vision map, we need to get working on articulating the vision of “why,” as that is what will build support.
- Columbia Land Conservancy: CLC will convene another Roundtable later in the year. In the meantime, let us know how we can support your trail efforts. One suggestion: we can set up a web page on our website that posts your trail news. Ellen will send out an email requesting that information on a regular basis. Think about what else will be of help. In the meantime, there is already a great deal of information on our website from the Columbia County Trails Conference [Columbia County Trails | Columbia Land Conservancy](#).