

Mayor Hart called the meeting to order at 6:00pm.

## **1. ROLL CALL**

Patricia Hart, Mayor at large; Councilors: Terry Berry, District 1; Tim Cusick, At large; Jon Ault, At large; Amy Rees, District 2; Shawn Dolley, District 3; Marc Rines, District 4; Maryann White, At large

Absent: City Manager, Christine Landes

Also in attendance: Anne Davis, Librarian; City Clerk, Kelly Gooldrup; Thomas Fiorelli, Economic & Planning Director; Tony LaPlante, Public Works Director; Stanley Koski, Richard Heath, Tom Reeves

## **2. PUBLIC COMMENT (anything not on the Agenda)**

None

## **3. PETITIONS/PUBLIC HEARINGS**

None

## **4. NEW BUSINESS**

### **1. Proposed Merrymeeting Trail Legislation/Presentation and request for support letter from Richard Heath**

Mr. Heath will be present to brief the City Council on a bill (LD1141) that is being submitted for consideration by the Legislature. This bill will direct the DOT to construct a trail along the existing rail bed between Gardiner and Topsham.

The City Council is being asked to consider submitting a letter to the transportation committee in support of this trail endorsement. The MMT Board of Supervisors feels that the development of this trail will provide recreational access to the river along with economic opportunities.

Richard Heath passed out some literature and fact sheets. He explained that the proposal is to use the existing rail bed, which means they will leave the rails intact and cover them over with stone dust. The cost would be around seven million dollars.

Councilor Berry asked if there would be any related cost or responsibilities to the municipalities. Richard Heath replied that he is not sure, but there may be some in the future.

Tom Reeves added that the State funded range could be eighty percent to one hundred percent. Councilor White stated that the fact sheet was based in 2011 at seven and half million. Do you anticipate that it is higher now?

Richard Heath replied that typically things do go up, but it would be up to DOT to conduct an assessment of cost.

Councilor Ault asked when the proposal would be presented to the DOT Committee.

Richard Heath thinks toward the end of May.

Councilor Ault asked if the Merrymeeting Trail Committee has had any discussions with Representative Warren.

Richard Heath answered that he had not.

Tom Reeves believes that Representative Warren is well aware of the Trail.

Councilor Ault asked if any other communities along the trail have sent letters.

Richard Heath said Topsham and Bowdoinham have sent letters. Richmond has not had a meeting yet.

Mayor Hart asked what happens to the ownership of the railroad.

Richard Heath believes that the right of way still belongs to the State of Maine and that will not change. If they decide to put the railroad back in there, it will be available.

Councilor Berry asked how much of the trail is within Gardiner's boundaries.

Tom Reeves replied approximately six miles.

Councilor Berry is concerned with Gardiner having to pay twenty to twenty five percent of the cost, like maintenance.

Mayor Hart asked if anyone from the audience would like to speak on this item.

Stanley Koski is an Augusta resident and is also a cofounder of the Maine Rail Group (MRG) established in 1989. He is opposing the proposal due to the future possibility of the rail line be reinstating and active again. There Amtrak Down-Easter passenger service has already been extended from Portland to Brunswick and in the future could extend through to Augusta and further.

Mayor Hart commented that there have been some tracks and rail bridges removed in the area.

Stanley Koski replied that the rail bridge in Dresden was removed by MDOT as a temporary measure due to the clearance being too low for tractor trailers to pass under. There is a similar bridge in Augusta.

Mayor Hart asked if the gravel placed over tracks in Augusta for parking would affect or prohibit the reactivating of the railroad.

Stanley Koski replied that it does not. The gravel can be removed to uncover the rails.

Councilor Ault moved to direct the City Manager and Economic Development Director to submit a letter of endorsement for LD1141, supporting the construction of a trail along the existing rail bed between Gardiner and Topsham.

Councilor Berry seconded.

Mayor Hart asked for any discussion.

Councilor Berry has concerns about the possible cost liability to the taxpayers of Gardiner.

Could the letter of support reflect that concern and reserve the right not to move forward due to the cost. Gardiner shouldn't be on the hook to come up with three hundred and eighty five thousand dollars. We may be open to maintenance costs in the future.

Councilor Cusick agrees with Councilor Berry that the Trail is very nice and the City of Gardiner cannot get stuck with the bill.

Councilor Rees asked if we do send a letter of support, does that commit us to spend the money.

Mayor Hart replied that we would have to vote on that separately.

Councilor Ault commented that this only expresses our support of the bill, not to commit to any funding.

Councilor Berry asked how much the City spends on the Kennebec Rail Trail.

Tony LaPlante answered about four thousand. We do not do any work on it, but for the last seven budgets, we put in four thousand to help maintain the trail which includes the snow removal.

Mayor Hart commented that she supports the amendment.

Councilor Ault withdrew his original motion and Councilor Berry withdrew his second.

Councilor Ault moved to direct the City Manager and Economic Development Director to submit a letter of endorsement for LD1141, supporting the construction of a trail along the existing rail bed between Gardiner and Topsham, with the understanding that there be no financial liability to the City of Gardiner.

Councilor Berry seconded.

Councilor Dolley supports the proposal but would like the Economic Development Director to look into the economic benefit of this trail verses the railroad coming through.

Tom Reeves gave a brief overview of the benefit differences. He stated that the rail trail has more potential than a passenger rail.

Mayor Hart asked for all those in favor. Unanimous

Thomas Fiorelli, Economic Development Director, stated that more people especially the younger generation are looking for alternative means for transportation. We need to look into the future for infrastructure.

#### ▪ **CITY MANAGER REPORT**

- All set

#### **2. CITY COUNCIL REPORT**

Councilor Ault: the City is facilitating a composting program, also would like to see an update on West Street home

Councilor Cusick: all set

Councilor White: took part in the earth day cleanup last Saturday and this Saturday will be taking part in a 5k to end hunger in Maine

Councilor Berry: as a member of the Age Friendly Committee, I attended a meeting and discussed transportation funding needs in the State of Maine.

Councilor Rees: all set

Councilor Dolley: all set

Councilor Rines: all set

Mayor Hart: We did have an earth day cleanup last Saturday with Upstream and many volunteers. The Bridge project is coming along. Johnson Hall did an Easter egg hunt last Saturday. Wednesday we have a ribbon cutting with two new businesses opening in the City. One is called Sew and Sews. The other is called Sew Fit Wellness Center. The revenue sharing bill that Representative Harnett sponsored made it out of Committee and will be going to Legislature.

#### **3. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

None

#### **4. ADJOURN**

Councilor Dolley moved to adjourn.

Councilor Rines seconded.

Mayor Hart asked for any discussion. Seeing none. All those in favor. Unanimous 6:53pm

*(Approved during the May 08, 2019 Council Meeting)*