



**GARDINER CITY COUNCIL
AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET**



Meeting Date	12/01/2021	Department	City Manager
Agenda Item	4.f) Consideration of petitioning the Maine Department of Transportation to create a Rail Corridor Use Advisory Council		
Est. Cost			

Background Information	<p>Merrymeeting Trail Board of Supervisors member and resident of Gardiner, Tom Reeves, would like to discuss this petition attached to this agenda item.</p>
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Requested Action	"I move to petition the Maine Department of Transportation to create a Rail Corridor Use Advisory Council"
City Manager and/or Finance Review	Acting City Manager approves the above action and wishes to thank Mr. Reeves for the countless volunteer hours he has dedicated to Gardiner.
Council Vote/ Action Taken	
Departmental Follow-Up	

City Clerk Use Only	1 st Reading _____	Advertised _____	EFFECTIVE DATE _____
	2 nd Reading _____	Advertised _____ w/in 15 Days	
	Final to Dept _____	Updated Book _____	Online _____

AN UPDATE ON THE MERRYMEETING TRAIL PROJECT AS OF 11-5-21

For many years, the communities in the vicinity of Merrymeeting Bay have envisioned an interconnected "Capital to Coast" trail system that would connect Augusta to Bath. Several trail segments of this vision have already been completed, including the Brunswick Bike & Pedestrian Path and the Kennebec River Rail Trail that links Gardiner to Augusta.

The Merrymeeting Trail project seeks join these two trails, repurposing the long-unused Lower Road rail corridor as a trail until such time as train service is identified as a feasible option for that corridor. The result would be a 26-mile stretch of multi-use trail from Topsham to Gardiner, running along the Kennebec and Cathance Rivers, through forests and fields, and through the heart of the villages in Bowdoinham and Richmond.

To help bring this vision to a reality, six years ago the four towns along the proposed Merrymeeting Trail route established the Merrymeeting Trail Board of Supervisors via interlocal agreement – a governmental entity with two representatives each from Topsham, Bowdoinham, Richmond, and Gardiner. Since then, the Board of Supervisors has met regularly to discuss how best to support this project. Two years ago, the Board and all four municipalities endorsed LD 1141, which sought to direct the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) to pursue the Merrymeeting Trail project.

In the years since, that bill has evolved into several others. In the most recent legislative session, the Legislature passed and the governor signed a number of significant bills that affect this effort:

- 2021 Public Law 239 creates a "Rail Corridor Use Advisory Council Process" so that government entities can request that MDOT consider alternative uses (such as trail use or bikeways) for unused rail corridors.
[getPDF.asp \(mainelegislature.org\)](#)
- 2021 Resolve 61 directs MDOT to develop and adopt an active transportation plan that considers rail corridors (including the Lower Road rail corridor that runs from Brunswick to Augusta) and submit it to the transportation committee by January 2023.
[getPDF.asp \(mainelegislature.org\)](#)
- 2021 Resolve 53 directs MDOT to conduct a transit propensity study for Portland to Bangor, which among other things will consider the feasibility of rail service along the Lower Road and Back Road (Portland to Lewiston/Auburn to Waterville and Bangor).
[getPDF.asp \(mainelegislature.org\)](#)

Each of these laws is an important step forward on Maine's path to creating a forward-looking transportation strategy that accounts for both trains and trails.

The next step in the process is for communities interested in exploring the potential for unused rail corridors near them to be repurposed as trails to formally request that MDOT initiate the Rail Corridor Use Advisory Council Process for that segment. This will prompt MDOT to form a council (with participants defined by statute and representing a broad swath of interests, including municipal leaders); the council will then have nine months to gather information (including a public advisory process led by MDOT); the council may then make a

recommendation to the Commissioner of Transportation regarding a new use for that corridor; the Commissioner may then bring that back to the Legislature.

At an upcoming meeting, the Merrymeeting Trail Board of Supervisors plans to vote to request that MDOT initiate this process for the Merrymeeting Trail. We are providing this update to our municipal governments along the corridor so you are aware of this intent, and so that you have the option to join this effort once again with a resolution of your own, which would help underscore the long-standing local community support for this project.

PROPOSED MOTION

“Pursuant to 2021 Public Law 239 I move that the City of Gardiner hereby petitions the Maine Department of Transportation to create a Rail Corridor Use Advisory Council to consider future use of the Lower Road Corridor from Rockland Junction in Brunswick to the east side of the railroad bridge in Augusta as a bikeway or trail.”