**Cobbossee Trail Committee Meeting**

**February 27, 2023**

**3:00pm**

1. **Meeting began at 3:04p.m.**

Welcome and Introductions.

Committee members: **Gay Grant** – Chair Cobbossee Trail Committee, **Allison Wells** – Gardiner resident and Communications Director Natural Resources Council of Maine; **Tom Reeves** –Gardiner resident, **Kate Carnes** – Gardiner resident, **Sara Maschino** – Gardiner resident**; Greg Ponte** – Upstream**; Tamara Whitmore** – Gardiner resident and Executive Director Gardiner Main Street.

City of Gardiner: **Mayor Pat Hart**, **City Manager** **Andrew Carleton**, **Melissa Lindley** – Economic Development Director, **John Cameron** – Deputy Public Works Director, **Kelly Hare** - Utility Billing Clerk

Maine DOT: **Dakota Hewlett** – Active Transportation Planner

Guests: **John Graham** – Upstream**, Steve Brook** – Chairman of the Board for Upstream; **Erik Phoenix** – Ransom Consulting, LLC

1. **Minutes from January 9, 2022, meeting**

Minutes accepted as presented.

1. **City Brownfields update, Erik Phoenix, Ransom Consulting, LLC**

The city of Gardiner was awarded a $500,000 grant from the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for the Brownfields Program and has contracted with Ransom Consulting to facilitate that program. (The city has had previous Brownfields Program funds. The previous grant was $200,000.)

There may be opportunities to use some of the funding to assist the trail project. This program is intended to facilitate environmental assessments of properties with the intention of redeveloping Brownfields properties in the city to make them usable again. He used the example of the old TW Dick site, which was redeveloped into the Fresenius Kidney Center. Brownfields funds can be used to assess properties not currently owned by the city.

Greg asked if this includes State owned properties too. Erik will research this question to get a final answer, however, he believes it should include State owned properties. Erik specified that the funds awarded to the City of Gardiner are for assessment for environmental research.

Gay asked what would trigger a Brownfields assessment? Erik said, “Anything that may have impacted the environmental condition of that property, for example, a railroad.”

Other questions included: if building a trail includes minimal disturbance of the ground, does the site need to be assessed as a Brownfield site? Erik stated that the EPA has developed guidelines for contaminants including those found in railroad corridors. If you’re going to use an old railroad corridor as a park, for example, there are formulas to determine how much of a certain contaminant can be present before it becomes a risk to the population.

Using the Town of Belfast as an example, Erik explained how Belfast used the Brownfield program to assess a portion of the trail that was being built in an old rail corridor and discovered contaminants at levels above the EPA safety guidelines. Belfast used this information to apply for funding to address the contaminants thereby preventing exposure risk to the public. Belfast used remediation funding for stone dust to create a barrier to human contact with the contaminant.

Tom asked if we use stone dust for the trail, would we still need to do the analysis? Erik answered no, the city can choose to build it any way they wish but reiterated that Gardiner has funds to use for this purpose. Dakota said there are some areas where DOT’s regulatory triggers would require an assessment to be done, depending on the funding source.

Gay asked Mayor Pat Hart about the city’s plans for the Brownfields funding. The mayor said that the plan is under development by the Economic Development Committee. The mayor added that we are going to need “pots” of money from “here, there and everywhere” to complete the trail, and this funding opportunity seemed like a good fit.

Tom asked if this is strictly a research paper project or, if something is found, will core samples be taken? Eric stated that phase one is paper. If phase 1 finds environmental contamination, phase 2 is a recommendation to take soil and water samples, etc.

Gay suggested that since we are using a DOT corridor, we would have to abide by DOT regulations as well. Dakota asked for clarification that the awarded funds are for the City at this time not to specific sites. Melissa stated they are looking into specific sites at this time and have just begun working with Ransom Consulting to identify potential properties. Gay stated this could be a valuable incentive for property owners along the stream to get their properties assessed and potentially apply for remediation funds to make their properties safe to use.

1. **Review of city’s trail planning to date - Mayor Pat Hart**

Mayor Hart gave a presentation of the last 25 years of changes in the City of Gardiner. (Please see PowerPoint slides.)

The city has applied for Congressional Earmark funds in the past two funding cycles. City Manager Andy Carleton recently met with Scott Wilkerson from Senator King’s office about funding opportunities. Gay asked if anyone from their office would provide a critique of our previous application, and Andy said he will follow up. Gay suggested a weakness in previous applications was lack of visuals to stress the connectivity of the Cobbossee Trail to other parts of the city, the region, and why it’s so special.

Mayor Hart brought up the point of how this trail would help our students connect to different parts of the city by using the example of the Boys & Girls Club. The students at that facility walk from our poorest neighborhood down to the Downtown.

Dakota suggested the city use the application checklist DOT uses to determine DOT support for applications when they are asked by the congressional delegation.

**4. Update on mapping project** – map project will be on our next agenda in detail. We will discuss and make some recommendation at the next meeting.

**5.** **Presentation by Upstream - Greg Ponte, Upstream**

Greg Ponte gave a presentation of where the Cobbossee Trail could go and how it will connect to different parts of the city.

Greg said there is funding for building fish passage at the Gardiner Paperboard Dam, which, he said, is also likely a Brownfields site. This site is a priority site because of the alewives. Cobbossee Stream and Cobbossee watershed can accept 3 million fish which can feed the eco system.

The original plan for the Cobbossee Trail that was approved by DOT in the late 2000’s included one million dollars to rehab the old rail trestle. Time has damaged the trestle to the extent that the city was given advice by consultants Malone & MacBroom that it was likely no longer feasible to rehab the trestle as planned. Greg said that the plan has always been to cross and connect to the Harrison Avenue Nature Trail and view the fish passage at the Kruger dam. There are considerable crossover interests between the Upstream fish restoration goals and the goals of the Cobbossee Trail committee, and many places for future connectivity.

**6. Questions for DOT – Dakota, DOT**

Part of the discussion included the best use of the remaining $600,000 left in the DOT grant, where does DOT want us to go next, and what are our next steps over the next two months?

DOT is looking for transportation “connectivity” specifically. Fish passage is great and so is the recreation piece, but he reminded the committee that when DOT funds are for transportation infrastructure, not recreation. DOT does not like to build dead ends, which is what we will have if the trail just ends at the edge of the stream with a scenic overlook because the bridge is unaffordable. The bridge is going to be well over one million dollars with construction cost increases.

Gay asked how has this change from the original vision, which DOT originally approved? Dakota replied it’s not different, but there are now many trail projects being considered in competition if we are looking for additional funds. He reminded the committee that DOT isn’t the only funding source. He struggles to see the transportation destination of this trail by stopping at Rt. 126.

Mayor Pat Hart suggested that maps can be provided to show “connectivity,” and exactly how this trail is truly transportation infrastructure. The mayor asked if the money that originally was committed is still committed. Dakota answered, “potentially.” He said DOT does not want to use project design funding if the city is not going to finish the trail. A Transportation trail needs to end at a logical place, a destination. If the city builds a park (not using transportation funds) then this is a destination, and we could end the trail there. There is also a church at the end of the trail, and he will research whether DOT would consider this a destination as well. There are several outstanding questions he hopes to have answers for by our next meeting.

**Meeting adjourned at 4:35pm**

**Next meeting**:

March 6, 2023

March 20, 2023