



Trail News

2010

Friends of the Northern Rail Trail

Trail Builder Extraordinaire Jim Gerding Retires from Board

The Friends of the Northern Rail Trail is sometimes asked, “This trail is so special, but where did it come from?” The answer is easy. Two men of great vision and capabilities – Cliff Below of Lebanon, who envisioned what the abandoned rail corridor could be back in the early ‘90s, and Jim Gerding of Enfield who got the work done, drove the beginning of the trail. As founder of FNRT, former state senator Below is well-known for his crucial leadership in both Concord and Grafton County, but Jim’s contribution has mostly gone unrecognized since he became Treasurer in 1996. On his retirement from the Board, it is his administration par excellence that earns him recognition as a Great Contributor to the trail and the region.

Year after year Jim prepared and submitted applications for grants funded by the Recreational Trails Program, arranged for contractors, ordered materials, supervised on-site work, collected and paid invoices, and insured that the Board received reimbursement from the State for various projects. He also maintained

records of volunteer hours which showed that the FNRT had complied with the required “matching grant.” He maintained the membership records, kept the bank account, filed annual reports and on and on. But that list doesn’t include the hard part, dealing with bureaucracy. Over the years the process of applying for a Trails Grants has involved more and more red tape, a classic case being the need for annual permission from the New Hampshire Bureau of Trails to work on the trail. Then there are “Special Use Permits,” insurance regulations, historical impact forms... and on and on and on.

Although he is unable to use the trail for recreation, Jim’s commitment to the Northern was driven by a strong sense of civic improvement, which also moved him to serve on the Enfield Conservation Commission for many years and the Mascoma Valley Regional School Board today. Jim gets stuff done, 23 miles of the Northern Rail Trail is testimony to that. Thanks Jim.

Enfield Trail Bridge Members Called to Action

The FNRT board is calling on its members and other friends of the trail to meet a threat to the

Northern’s continuity, character, and enjoyment. As part of a larger project that includes a new Shaker Bridge over Mascoma Lake, Enfield selectmen recently asked the NHDOT to reverse the plan for a trail bridge over Main Street with an at-grade road crossing. This marks a radical change from the original design presented in 2005 to FNRT and the public that called for replacing the antique, one-car railroad underpass with a bike/pedestrian-style bridge. Your board has been pursuing the matter since it arose in the fall, attending a selectmen’s meeting in December at which project manager Alex Vogt took public comment on the town’s request. “What we learned there was that it’s an aesthetic issue, but one that’s awfully hard to understand,” says board chair Dick Mackay. “They say a bridge will block the view of the lake, but we figured a driver would have a view for about



four seconds, if that, before passing under the bridge. And since the bridge is 14 feet high and a driver sits at about five feet, there actually would be no blockage of view.”

Linda Zoller-McKibbin, board member from Enfield, emphasized the safety issue. “A five-year-old learning to ride a bike and coming down a ramp towards the street is not safe. That is why I oppose an at-grade crossing.”

In January, Dick Mackay and FNRT, Merrimack Co. co-founder Alex Bernhard attended a meeting of the NHDOT Cultural Resources committee that included reps of the state’s Division of Historical Resources, N.H. Department of Transportation, and the Federal Highway Administration. This committee reviews how projects impact properties eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, such as the Northern Rail Trail. The trail reps made the case that an at-grade crossing compromises the integrity of the Northern corridor and requested a new environmental review be conducted of the project with the at-grade crossing. Their suggestion is to be submitted by local Federal Highway reps to their D.C. headquarters for decision.

The FNRT board and local snowmobile clubs have expressed their opposition to a road crossing to the N.H. Bureau of Trails. Now is the time for members and other trail users to express their opinions to officials at the NHDOT.

Please mail the enclosed card. Also, please sign your name and note what town you’re from. Political pressure can save the bridge.

Trail Projects for 2010

First on the agenda for this year is completion of the 2009 recreational trails grant, the \$20,000 funding to be used to surface the trail from Bullocks Crossing in Grafton west to the Route 4 underpass, a distance of 1.2 miles.



This is the last lengthy unimproved section on the entire 23 miles of the Northern Trail. Brush cutting to ease dump-truck access was done by volunteers last fall, with most of the trimming done by Ken Warren of Lebanon. Under N.H. Bureau of Trails rules,

FNRT has until June 30 to complete the Grafton job

Muddy Section of the Trail to be Improved this Year



Joggers will be particularly happy to hear that in January, FNRT submitted a 2010 grant application to improve the drainage and surface condition along the most heavily used section of the trail between downtown Lebanon and Mascoma Lake. The perpetual mud hole between the CCBA trailhead and Bank Street Extension will be fixed once and for all, as will a wet spot near Riverside Drive. Several hundreds yards of sloppy ground to the east of the Route 4/4A bridge area will be ditched for the second time in five years, hopefully for good.

On the subject of drainage, over the years our contractor, Ira Herrin, has dug out hundreds of yards of debris-filled ditches and freed up numerous clogged culverts, both the result of a deferred maintenance policy by the B&M Railroad after the line became disused almost 40 years ago. There are a few spots along the trail where new culverts, some no bigger than eight-inch

diameter, would appear to solve chronic water-flow problems. But at the direction of NHDOT, the Bureau of Trails discourages new pipe, and for good reason. If the water is sent someplace it hasn't been for the last 150 years DOT will hear about it, and then the Bureau of Trails will hear about it, and then FNRT...you get the picture.

Hard and Fast Winter Trail

The Northern Rail Trail is a four season recreational asset. Whether on skis, dog sled, skimobile, or on foot it is a place to enjoy winter as well as the warmer months.

Though there was limited snow early in the season, grooming by the Twin State Trail Busters perfected the trail surface until the late January rains.

Mascoma River Greenway Study Underway

The long-dreamed-of connection between downtown Lebanon and West Lebanon may one day become a reality

thanks to the vision of city residents and the City's funding of a feasibility study that is now underway. In November, the Mascoma River Greenway (MRG) committee, organized under the direction of then recreation director Cindy Heath, recommended the awarding of a \$50,000 contract. From among a dozen original submissions, four proposals were chosen for presentation to the committee.

The contract winner includes ORW Landscape Planners and Architects of White River Junction led by Bob White, a design professional whose long experience in the Upper Valley includes evaluation of the Westboro Rail Yard for the city. VHB (Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc.) is an engineering and design firm of high reputation throughout the East. Alta Planning and Design of Bedford, N.H., is an acknowledged rail trail expert. Its point man on the Lebanon project, Greg Bakos, is one of the founders of the N.H. Rail Trail Alliance.

The Statement of Qualifications was prepared by the ORW/VHB/Alta group, tapped as the most cogent for its recognition of the challenges facing the concept.

The timeline for the study projects a presentation to the community in mid-2010. Members of the MRG committee include Frank Gould, Clark and Happy Griffiths, Betsy Drinkwater, and Dick Mackay, Cindy Heath as well as John Taylor and Russ Hirschler of the U.V. Trails Alliance, and Lelia Mellen of the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program.

FNRT Board Members	
Earl Brady	Enfield
Nancy Emery	Hanover
Will Hively	Canaan
Dick Mackay	Hanover
Amelia Sereen	Lebanon
Ken Warren	Lebanon
Linda Zoller-McKibbin	Enfield

MRG Needs Big-Time Political Muscle Opinion By Dick Mackay

Unlike the development of the existing Northern Trail, extending the rail trail to West Lebanon must be a City-led project—that is, with a formal outside consultant feasibility study. But it has been clear for years that unless the City was willing to be aggressive with the state, it might as well forget it.

Fifteen years ago, the 58 miles of corridor east of Lebanon were dropped in our lap, with a hands-off policy by the state vastly easing redevelopment. While the leadership of then state rep. Clifton Below of Lebanon was crucial in organizing volunteers to make the Northern a usable reality, politics were hardly a concern. It came out of nowhere, but this time we ARE going nowhere unless the journey starts in Concord

The Mascoma River Greenway is no small thing, but if it is going to happen, leadership is going to have to come forward, just as it did ten years ago when elected officials in Lebanon leaned hard on NHDOT to force the B&M RR to sell the Westboro Yard and the section to Timken. (How soon one forgets that episode.) The MRG committee agrees that the group needs muscle—a "finisher" who will produce a plan of action—because right now it is accomplishing little more than seeing a wish list torpedoed by Tail and Transit point man Kit Morgan. Simply put, the Rail and Transit division of NHDOT is institutionally opposed to this project and will do everything it can to frustrate it, as it has other rail trails in the state, most notably—in Laconia.

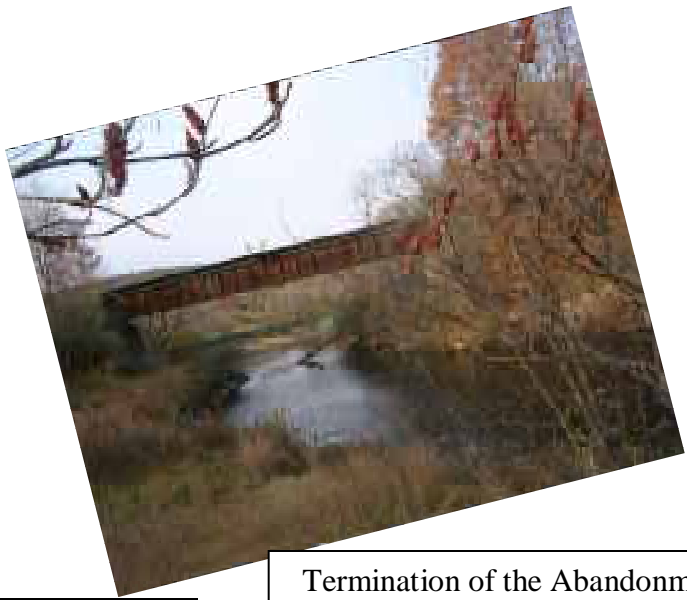


Work on the APD Connector Path

Undeveloped Section of the Northern



Looking west along at the loose tracks left behind by the salvage crew in 1994. The embankment is above Longacre Landscaping



Termination of the Abandonment at the bridge over the Mascoma River Timken Aerospace out of the picture to the left.