



CITY OF KEENE NEW HAMPSHIRE

ITEM #D.6.

Meeting Date: February 1, 2024
To: Mayor and Keene City Council
From: Municipal Facilities, Services and Infrastructure Committee, Standing Committee
Through:
Subject: PowerPoint Presentation - Transportation Heritage Trail, Phase 1 – Proposed Action

Council Action:

In City Council February 1, 2024.

Voted unanimously to carry out the intent of the report.

Recommendation:

On a vote of 5-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee recommends authorizing the City Manager to do all things necessary to implement the proposed action as presented for the Transportation Heritage Trail Phase 1 project to include:

- Trail alignment along the Rail Corridor;
- Screening consisting of chain link fencing with slats;
- Implementation of Trailhead Alternative 1 including angled parking and one way traffic circulation through the parking lot, and;
- Surface Materials consisting of stone dust

Attachments:

None

Background:

Brett Rusnock, Infrastructure Project Manager, introduced himself and David McNamara, Project Manager from Stantec Consulting Services, which is managing the design of this project. He continued that he would begin with a recap of the Transportation Heritage Trail project and the City's grand scheme to connect the current southeastern limits of the Cheshire Rail Trail in Keene, which ends at Eastern Ave. The plan is to extend it to the northern limit of Rt. 101, over route Rt. 101, over the historic Stone Arch Bridge, over Swanzey Factory Rd. with a re-used bridge, and eventually connecting to the existing trail network in the town of Swanzey.

Mr. Rusnock continued that tonight's presentation is about Phase 1 of the Transportation Heritage Trail, which extends from Eastern Ave. to the northern edge of Rt. 101. In 2021, the City applied for and received a Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) grant from the Federal Government for this work. That grant program is specifically focused on providing alternatives to vehicle use for transportation. In 2022, the City applied for and received a Congressionally directed spending grant,

which used to be called “earmarks,” for the same project. Those two grants are the majority of the budget for this project. It is an 80% Federal cost share with a 20% local match.

David McNamara stated that he will go through the public process they have been through to date and walk through the alternatives they have been reviewing based on that process. They started the project in early December with a “local concerns” meeting where they presented the project purpose and need to the public. They talked about the overview of the process they have to follow because of the Federal funds, then broke into small group sessions and talked through the project, listening to the abutters and other stakeholders to get feedback on their issues and concerns. It was a successful meeting, with over 60 people. They talked about what people were going to use the trail for, and biking and walking for exercise were the top two. The two main concerns that stood out were drainage and the security and privacy of the abutting parcels along the trail corridor.

Mr. McNamara continued that following that meeting, Stantec started to put some alternatives together and started the design process. They met again a couple weeks ago and presented alternatives on a few different elements of the project – alignments, screening, the trailhead and crossing of Eastern Ave., and the surface of the trail. He will walk through most of that in tonight’s presentation, the feedback that Stantec received, and their recommendations for some of those different elements.

Mr. McNamara stated that regarding project alternatives on the alignment side, they looked at three different locations. Referring to a PowerPoint slide, Mr. McNamara pointed out the multi-use trail along Chapman Rd., and the trail along the rail corridor, and went on to describe suggested alignment options utilizing Marlboro St. and reconstructing Marlboro St. into a Complete Street to allow the trail users to access Marlboro St. and then connect back to the trail corridor as it approaches Rt. 101. Mr. McNamara continued that starting with the railroad corridor, the slide shows a couple of typical sections and a snippet of the trail below. The drainage issue is that it kind of “acts as a bathtub right now.” The water ponds at the bottom of the trail. The slide shows bringing the trail up a little bit, to create some swales on the side, to allow the water to run down and get to the drainage systems that do exist out there but just do not function anymore. Similarly, with the trail at grade, you can see a bit of a cut to create those same swales in some different areas of the trail. They would use a combination of these, based on the grading, to get that water to move as it flows into the trail area. The green in the image shows what would be disturbed for that work.

Mr. McNamara stated that looking at the Chapman Rd. alternative, you can see there is a lot more green there (indicating what would be disturbed). He continued that for a large part of Chapman Rd., if they were to build that multi-use trail, it would hang out over that existing slope. That would push that slope further out, and they would have to clear all of those existing trees. Much of that is on private property. Thus, there would be many impacts to build the multi-use path off the edge of Chapman Rd.

Mr. McNamara stated that regarding the Marlboro St. alternative, it would be trying to turn Marlboro St. into a Complete Street that met the City guidelines. It would have a bike path on either side and one 5-foot sidewalk, as opposed to the 10-foot wide multi-use trail that is proposed along the corridor. There are a couple of concerns here. There is a steep drop-off on the left side and some stone retaining walls on the right side along the private property. Thus, to fit the widening through there they would need to push into the walls and into some of the landscaped features on some of these properties, or they would have to push out onto that slope, and start to create similar slope impacts as they go on the other side. The other issue with Marlboro St. is they would have to get up, to get back on the rail corridor to where the Prowse Bridge will cross Rt. 101. The only way to do that would be to cut through existing private property, and even that would be a rather steep slope for the trail. Everywhere else, it would be 1 or 2%, and it would be 5 or 6% to be able to get that slope to

work. It would hurt the accessibility of the trail and have private property impacts.

Mr. McNamara continued that the team created rating criteria for each of the alignment alternatives, including a “no build” alternative. (As shown on the slide), the railroad corridor alignment clearly rose to the top, based on the rating criteria. It has the accessibility, keeps people out of traffic, and minimizes the right-of-way impacts and the clearing impacts. The team found it to be the best of the three options, the most suitable for the City and to accomplish the purpose and need of the project. With the Chapman Rd. alternative, the impacts would be more significant, and Marlboro St. has some constraints within the corridor and within some existing landscaping features as well as the need to get back up to the trail at the end and make that grading work.

Mr. McNamara continued that next the team looked at screening. The slide shows precedent images for some of the screening alternatives they considered. One is a chain link fence with privacy slats, which could be black or another color. Others show two different ways to use landscaping to create screening as well as some buffer, and as a way to keep people from crossing into the (private) properties. Two other photos show fences that do not really give privacy but delineate where the properties are and where the public right-of-way ends. Two other photos show stockade and shadow box fences, which give privacy and security. The team used rating criteria to evaluate the four alternatives, along with the “no build” alternative. They found that chain link fence with privacy slats was the best fit for the City, largely from a cost and maintenance standpoint. The landscaping does not necessarily provide the security that the others would. The stockade and shadow box fencing provide the security and the screening but at a higher cost and would require much more maintenance. The split rail and post rail fences would not really provide security or screening.

Mr. McNamara continued that next, the team looked at alternatives for the trailhead and crossing. The existing parking lot is at the end of the Cheshire Rail Trail, off Eastern Ave. Based on being out there and laying it out, the team figures that probably seven or eight cars could fit in the lot today. They looked at a couple of different ways to configure that, to see if they could gain some more parking as well as integrate that with the extension of the trail and how everything will cross Eastern Ave. Option 1 is to create a multi-use trail on the edge of Eastern Ave., bring the existing Cheshire Rail Trail along that, along the back of the parking, and having a one-way circulation pattern through with the parking lot with some angled spaces, and then there is the crossing of Eastern Ave. Option 2 would be to pull the trail back in front of the parking, so you are not interacting with vehicles coming in and out of the parking lot, with a similar crossing of Eastern Ave. The problem here is it pushes the parking closer to Eastern Ave., so you are not able to maneuver in and out of those parking spaces without backing into Eastern Ave. There are concerns about that. Option 2A is similar, except it has angled spaces, which creates a little more room, but it still is not enough to get out of the Eastern Ave. interaction with parked vehicles. Option 3 would be to have the crossing come straight through where the existing trail ends, a little closer to the corner of Chapman Rd. That shrunk the parking layout a bit, leading to fewer parking spaces. The other concern with this option is the high point as you come over the intersection. The crossing puts you out of the sightlines for traffic coming up Eastern Ave., which is a safety issue.

Mr. McNamara continued that again, they used rating criteria to assess the alternatives. They found Option 1 to be the most beneficial. It gives the most parking, allows better vehicle access, and keeps the vehicles out of the road. It does not get pedestrians outside of the vehicle area, but it does keep everything in the parking lot.

Mr. McNamara continued that finally, they looked at the different trail surface alternatives, which would be stone dust or pavement. The City has both, at various points within the trail system. Cost is one of the bigger considerations. There is probably a 15-20% premium for the pavement over the stone dust. Other considerations are topography and drainage, maintenance, and trail use. There

are certain things you can do on a paved trail but not stone dust, and vice versa. Another consideration is pedestrians and ADA accessibility. The team looked at the two surfaces, noting that in this case, along the rail corridor the trail will be flat. They are not particularly concerned about erosion and such issues with the stone dust. From a money perspective, stone dust seems to be a better option instead of pavement.

Mr. McNamara continued that the team hopes to get concurrence on a recommendation for moving forward with a proposed action on the different elements, and they will be able to wrap up the engineering study. That will allow them to move into preliminary design in the spring and summer, with permitting next fall, with the intention of having the final design and bid documents around this time January next year for 2025 construction if all goes well.

Mr. McNamara continued that to summarize the different elements they talked about, for the trail alignment, the team recommends the rail corridor. For screening, they recommend the chain link fence with the slats. For the trailhead, they recommend Option 1, which is the angled parking and one-way circulation through the parking lot. For the surface materials, they recommend stone dust.

Chair Greenwald asked the Committee and the public for their thoughts on the alignment, screening, trailhead, and surface materials.

Councilor Filiault stated that a constituent who is an abutter called him, and could not be here tonight. He continued that this abutter is in favor of the project but still has concerns about the screening. He will not let that hold back his vote tonight, but he will give the abutter's name to the City Manager so that his issues can hopefully be rectified.

John Marcheski of 6 Birch St. stated that he also has a property on Marlboro St. that abuts the trail. He asked if the chain link fence would be six feet or eight feet tall. Mr. McNamara replied six feet. Mr. Marcheski asked if they would consider eight feet. Mr. Rusnock replied that they have not yet established how tall the fence needs to be. He continued that generally, the City tries for six-foot fences, which are easier to maintain and less expensive. If there were an identified need to make it higher for security, they would certainly consider that. Chair Greenwald stated that he anticipates this will not be a very heavily traveled area. He continued that if it turns into a problem it could be dealt with. He himself was looking at the vegetation screening options, but he is hearing from Councilor Filiault and Mr. Marcheski that apparently the chain link is important, to keep folks off of private property.

Richard Bergeron of 564 Marlboro St. stated that he is down at the end where everything tightens up. He continued that his bedroom window is probably 20 feet from the delineation markers that are there now. There is always an element of people you do not want near your property walking through your property, and loose dogs, and everything and so forth that comes with it. That is his concern. He would like the chain link fence with the slats. He does not care if it is eight feet or six feet.

Mr. Lussier stated that he did not hear the team mention it, but something they talked about internally is that the fencing they recommend and propose is not going to be needed in all areas the same. He continued that at the western end of the corridor near Eastern Ave., the rail trail is well below the elevation of the surrounding homes. It is almost like a berm of earth between the folks on the pathway and the homes, to the point where you cannot actually see the residents nearby. At the eastern end where Mr. Bergeron lives, absolutely, the rail bed is at the same elevation of his house, and fencing would be needed. They are looking to determine where the fencing is needed to provide the security and privacy that people clearly expressed they want.

Chair Greenwald asked if there were any further comments from the Committee or the public. Hearing none, he asked for a motion.

Councilor Filiault made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Madison.

On a vote of 5-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee recommends authorizing the City Manager to do all things necessary to implement the proposed action as presented for the Transportation Heritage Trail Phase 1 project to include:

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