

North Country Scenic Byways Council
Meeting Minutes
July 13th, 2010

Attendees: Betsey Harding (Jackson), Rob Nadler (Albany), Charles Muller (Jefferson), Chris Thayer (AMC), Ken Allen (USFS)
Guests: Dean Eastman (NHDOT)
Phone: Frumie Selchen (Arts Alliance of Northern NH)
Staff: Mary Deppe (NCC)

Welcomes & Introductions

The meeting began at 1pm at the NCC offices in Bethlehem.

Scenic Byways Program Updates

Mt. Washington Overlook: Dean Eastman explained that the Mount Washington Overlook project has been on the books since 2004. A plan had been worked out with the previous owners that there would be a land swap and that NHDOT District 1 would do some of the site work. There are now new owners and there needs to be discussions to see if they would be willing to swap the land. At this point in time, there is about \$450,000 available for this project including the match and the federal portion, and that is about half of what is needed. Because of drainage and terrain issues, a retaining wall needs to be built to support the railroad. Dean said that it is most likely that this project will be closed out and started over. In the original estimate, a lot of issues were overlooked including handicapped parking, the retaining wall, increasing costs of materials, etc.

Dean explained that the hotel has expressed an interest in the project, but have not shown a clear financial interest. He explained that ideally, the hotel would contribute the match and it would allow them to have a say in what happens with the project. At this point, there are too many problems with the project and it needs to start over. Since it is federal funding, there is not a lot of wiggle room. One downfall is that if the project is started over they would need to go through the permitting process again.

Chris Thayer said that at least an overlook exists now. There was some discussion about putting the power lines underground. Dean explained that the federal funding will not pay for underground power lines. Not eligible as match either. Match means your portion of eligible expenses.

Ken Allen explained that there is another opportunity for funding through multi-modal and intermodal network. Dean explained that if the project is closed out it goes back to the feds and cannot be used for another project in New Hampshire.

Saco Lake Project: Dean Eastman explained that he met with the new District 1 engineer, Brian Schutt, and the intent is to move forward with this project. There are some drainage issues to deal with but the hopes are to have the engineering done this year and construction next spring.

2010 Grant Round Update: Dean Eastman explained that a total of 6 applications were forwarded to FHWA and NHDOT hopes to hear back from them in October or November about what is being funded. After the grant award the sponsor signs a contract with NHDOT, and then that contract goes to G&C for

approval. The process can take 3-6 months. Contracts for projects funded this year are not going to G&C until July 28th, 2010.

Dean explained that a 20% match is needed at the time of application. He also explained that \$440,000 in projects were funded in NH in 2009. On average, NH receives about \$500,000 per grant round, but it is not based on any allocation. This year, the NH applications are competing with those from 46 other states.

Rob Nadler asked if FHWA ever partially funds projects and Dean said yes, they have before. Dean went on to explain that FHWA does not like to fund phases and would rather give a project more money and fund the whole thing.

There was some discussion about what the process is for FHWA to select projects for funding. Ken and Dean explained that the key is to follow the application and provide info in a clear and precise manner. Applications that do not follow the process exactly are thrown out.

Betsey asked what the timing is for the 2011 grant round and what the best way to position ourselves is. Dean explained that letters of intent will be due between October 15th and November 15th, 2010. The letters of intent will ask for some of the following: what is the project, what is the location, what's the project cost, who is the sponsor, etc. One of the important things to know is that applicants need to establish an indirect rate, and many small nonprofits do not already have one. This is something that can take a while so people should start now. Once letters of intent are submitted, applicants will have to attend a workshop or their application will be rejected.

Ken Allen explained that if people familiarize themselves with the applications now, then with will have an easier time. He explained that it is important to have a good sales pitch. The people reviewing the applications are not local, so it's important to really explain why it is important, where it is located, and to have a good budget.

Betsey suggested sending letters to towns along the White Mountain Trail and suggesting that if they are interested in applying, then they should look at the application and put together a summary of what they want to do. Then they could meet with this group and discuss the next steps. Dean explained that it is important that applicants know that projects must benefit the byway user first. Dean also suggested that people gather numbers and show the real numerical benefit of a project.

Ken said that it would be helpful for people to sit through a process for a year and then apply the next year. Dean discussed the project about the conservation easement in Albany and how they couldn't show how the project would benefit the byway user first. Some of the things that would be needed to do that are a parking lot, signs, etc. Betsey mentioned that there needs to be more online access for byway users.

Designation of Byways

Dean explained that NHDOT through the State Scenic Byway Council have voted to de-designate some NH State Byways that do not have a Committee to manage them. Ken explained that they could reduce the number of byways or even consider looking at some to be designated as National Scenic Byways. Mary Deppe explained that NCC had submitted an application for funding to develop Corridor Management Plans for the Presidential Range Trail and the River Heritage Trail. These loops connect to the White Mountain Trail and Connecticut River National Scenic Byways. She also explained that we are

going to consider looking at other sources of funding for these byways like Economic Development funds, because the Scenic Byways funding is difficult to get.

Bylaws

Mary Deppe explained that at a previous meeting, Chris Thayer suggested creating a set of “guidelines” rather than bylaws for the North Country Scenic Byways Council. Mary Deppe drafted a set of guidelines and distributed to the committee to review and comment on. She asked the committee to consider who the membership should consist of and how they become voting members. Dean suggested that this group needs bylaws and should have legal counsel review them.

Ken Allen said that if a byway doesn’t have a Corridor Management Plan, they can’t get funding.

Membership

There was some discussion about reaching out to towns along all of the North Country Byway loops and asking if their byway is important to the town, if they want it to remain a byway, if they would consider appointing a representative to the committee, and who that representative is. There was discussion about also including Historical Societies, Conservation Groups, Chambers of Commerce, Town Road Agents, etc. Mary suggested that the development of a “job description” could help give members more information about what their role would be on the council.

There was also discussion about the meeting times and how many people would prefer a night meeting because they work during the day. Mary Deppe said she would send out a survey to the current members and try to find out what days of the week work best and what times work best. Chris Thayer suggested having quarterly meetings based around milestones that happen during the year like grant rounds, etc.

Betsey said that the bylaws need to be clearer about who can be on this committee. Chris said that if there are too many people the committee is no longer effective. Ken said we need to make it clear that if people want to have a say on this committee they actually have to come and be here. He also suggested that this group should solidify what we have, not expand.

Other Issues

Betsey stated that the Presidential Range Trail is important and shouldn’t go away.

Some members discussed that the meetings should be quarterly and held from 4-6pm.

Next Meeting

TBA

Minutes written by Mary Deppe

7/15/10