

Apr 07 2022 8:40 am

Meeting Minutes of the
Economic Development Committee of the Fitchburg City Council
for
Tuesday, April 5, 2022

Chairperson Van Hazinga called the meeting to order at approximately 6:31 p.m. in the Legislative Building at 700 Main Street, Fitchburg, MA.

Members Present:

Councilor Sally Cragin, *Chair*
Councilor Anthony Zarrella
Councilor Paul Beauchemin
Councilor Samantha Squailia
Councilor Andrew Van Hazinga

Others Present:

Councilor Derek Cruz
Larry Cassasa, *chair of Twin Cities Rail Trail Assoc. (TCRTA)*
Tom Skwierawski, *Executive Director of Planning & Community Development*
Mary Jo Bohart, *Economic Development Director*

Public Comment:

None

Agenda Items:

032-22. ORDERED THAT: Authorizing the Mayor to execute a Memorandum of Agreement between the City of Fitchburg and the Twin Cities Rail Trail Association regarding the roles and responsibilities of each party to maintain the new trail as outlined in the attached Order.

[Memorandum of Agreement](#)

Mr. Tom Skwierawski explained the nature of the MOA between the two municipalities and the volunteer organization, including shared roles. Mr. Cassasa explained the process that led to the fundraising approach being used to generate funds that will become an endowment, to eventually provide perpetual revenue for ongoing maintenance of the TCRT corridor.

Councilor Marcus DiNatale shared concerns about maintaining the trail, which he aired early in the design process as well. He felt that reliance on volunteers is a wait-and-see approach, where community engagement will assist here and there but may not be reliable. Councilor DiNatale emphasized that the Friends of TCRT group will remain active on a long term basis. He noted that any problems that arise along the trail will need to be address expeditiously, and he asked if the city's contract with Waste Management Inc. will be used for regular trash removal services.

Mr. Skwierawski clarified that Waste Management is the trash hauler. He acknowledged that there has been some early, unofficial usage of the trail by the general public, prior to construction being complete and it being officially opened. Such use has led to trash along the corridor and even some illegal dumping, but the TCRT is still technically the responsibility of the construction contractor until its completion in June. Mr. Skwierawski anticipates a thorough cleanup of the corridor prior to the trail officially becoming a public use corridor and before any formal grand opening, likely sometime in June.

Councilor DiNatale inquired whether the city of Leominster has more linear length of trail than the city of Fitchburg. Mr. Cassasa explained that it is actually close to a 50:50 proportion between the two municipalities as far as trail length. He went on to explain that along with both Mayors serving on the TCRT committee there is also one Mayoral appointee from each city, with Amy LeBlanc (senior project manager) being Mayor DiNatale's appointee.

Councilor Samantha Squailia asked about language stating that the TCRT will review and approve any special events along the trail. She asked whether this would actually be a municipal process, much like any other Fitchburg special event request. Mr. Cassasa clarified that the TCRT will serve more as a clearinghouse for TCRT public event requests, with the municipality utilizing its customary public event approval process for events in Fitchburg.

Councilor Squailia anticipates constituents contacting her regarding issues that may occur along the TCRT, and she asked how will TCRT issues be reported so they can be quickly addressed? Mr. Cassasa noted that TCRTA will need to establish a single point of contact to field issues from community members.

Mr. Skwierawski added that the existing *SeeClickFix* mobile app, which is already actively used by the general public, will continue to be a highly effective tool for reporting field conditions that need to be addressed or other problems observed along the TCRT. Councilor Squailia suggested adding a new feature such as a drop-down menu that specifically lists TCRT within the *SeeClickFix* options.

Councilor Maria Fleming expressed concerns regarding general safety along the TCRT corridor. She asked if Fitchburg Police Dept. (FPD) will have law enforcement control over trail use, such as when illegal motorized vehicles attempt to use the corridor. She asked if putting cameras up or call-boxes along the trail for added security was being considered.

Mr. Cassasa explained that CSX Railroad was, in essence, an absentee owner, which led to inappropriate use of the corridor in the past. He emphasized that TCRTA will be conscientious in upkeep of the trail, and FPD will similarly make sure it is well policed. Mr. Skwierawski stated that conduit for lighting and potentially call-boxes was factored into "Phase 2" of the TCRT improvements. He added that FPD is considering acquisition of 4-wheel all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) to travel the TCRT corridor more effectively.

Councilor Fleming inquired whether community cleaning crews from the MA Dept. of Corrections (DOC) inmates might resume and whether that labor could be used periodically in TCRT upkeep.

Mr. Skwierawski acknowledged that use of DOC crews is being considered for the trail.

Councilor Bernard Schultz asked whether the cost breakdown for maintenance of the Fitchburg segment of the TCRT is currently known, and if not, then what is the fundraising goal. Mr. Cassasa said cost estimates have been obtain via bids and the scope includes annual overgrowth cutting. He stated that the TCRTA has an overall fundraising goal of \$500,000 which, although both ambitious and sizable, would lead to creation of an endowment that could generate approximately \$20,000 annually for trail maintenance.

Councilor Schultz asked about the current volunteer base associated with TCRTA. Mr. Cassasa stated that the current group of volunteers is comprised of TCRTA itself, friends of the trail (from general public) and also several local church groups.

Vote: A motion was made by Councilor Squailia to recommend **approval of Order 032-22**, seconded by Councilor Fleming. The motion passed 5-0.

009-22. The Fitchburg Planning Board, to amend the Fitchburg Zoning Ordinance by making several corrections & clarifications, as described in the enclosed Petition.

Link to proposed changes:

<https://www.fitchburgma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/9377/Memo-re-Jan2022-ZO-minor-amendments-010422>

Chair Van Hazinga stated that pending amendment to the Fitchburg Zoning Ordinance has undergone several revisions and clarifications since the Planning Board last reviewed the document. As a result, he recommended postponement of discussion of this item until most recent version of the amended ordinance receives Planning Board review.

Vote: A motion was made by Councilor DiNatale to recommend **holding Petition 009-22**, seconded by Councilor Schultz. The motion passed 5-0.

Adjournment

Councilor Squailia motioned to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Councilor Fleming. The motion passed by unanimous consent and the Economic Development Committee of the City Council adjourned at approximately 6:59 pm.

Minutes prepared by Ms. Bohart & reviewed by Chair Van Hazinga