

Laura Ginsburg  
Planning Commission Chair

I am writing to voice my opinion on allowing unlimited access to Tunbridge's Legal Trails. I believe these trails are a precious resource for our community. The bike events that take place in Tunbridge have 40 miles of class III and class IV gravel roads to use. Opening the legal trails to vast numbers of cyclists would do irrevocable harm. It's not about children and families or the walking groups using these trails. It's about preserving the integrity of this unspoiled asset for residents to use responsibly. We need to be considerate neighbors and ecologically minded citizens.

Fern Strong

May 24, 2021

Dear Tunbridge Planning Commission:

This letter is in regard to the use of legal trails in Tunbridge. I understand that these trails are currently open to public use. And, because the Town does not currently have a policy, these trails can be used for mixed recreational purposes. My position is that mixed use should remain the status quo.

I am a Tunbridge resident of 24 years. My husband and I use these trails regularly and typically access them either by hiking or biking. My concern about maintaining access to the trails is two-fold regarding equity and discrimination.

Looking through the testimony provided on the town website, I am concerned that some residents are willing to whittle down their own access to these trails due to a concern over tourist traffic and organized bike events. One testimonial regarding the planning of the 2019 Ranger bike event states, "If landowner objections had not been an issue, Orchard Road would have likely been included in the route as well." (Rose, 3/10, p.2) This statement tells me that the Ranger organizers contacted said landowner to discuss routing the event through Orchard Road. And, when the landowner objected, the organizers honored that. My understanding is that this is how large events of this type are typically organized—honoring the input of landowners who would be affected. If this is the case, why would it then be necessary to limit trail access in any way?

Another presentation states the importance of keeping town trails open because the increasing development of private land limits access for outdoor recreational activity. "Town-controlled corridors help to ensure that there will continue to be a place to enjoy these activities," in addition to linking various trail systems. (Sacca, 3/10, slide #10, VTrans) Several people stated that there are plenty of class 3 and 4 roads that provide good access for riding activity. While this is true, limiting trail access to hiking only would create an inequity between Tunbridge residents. There are many people in town who do not enjoy the privilege of owning their own track of land or only own a small parcel. Keeping the trails as mixed use creates equity because it provides everyone off-road access to enjoy the woodlands. Changing trail designation in any way favors the landowners to the exclusion of their neighbors.

I am particularly bothered by the level of vitriol in this process leveled at bicycle riders. I am very sorry that some of my neighbors have had unpleasant encounters with cyclists. But, disrespect is not characteristic to all cyclists and is certainly not exclusive to cyclists alone. The desire to

limit access, however, based on a few unfortunate encounters is wrong. Additionally, limiting access based on the argument that bikes are more destructive to trails than any other form of recreational activity is simply not true. Any type of recreational activity has the potential to cause the erosion or destruction of trails in its own way. These arguments just serve to foster stereotypes that discriminate against cyclists, most of whom are actually very conscientious in their use of trails and toward landowners.

It is clear that leaving the trails open to mixed use will involve working out many details such as whether to improve and maintain the trails, and whether or not to post them. I feel sure we can work out these details to everyone's satisfaction while keeping the trails open to all types of recreational use.

Sincerely,  
Anne Leeds