

Tunbridge Legal Trails

Public Comment

September 2021

9/21 – Lori Berger

I am writing to Todd Tyson, Laura Ginsberg (Planning Commission Chair) and Jonathan Bicknell (Trails Committee Chair) to clarify several things in response to Todd's letter of 9/9.

The signs state trails are open for walking. Not "walking next to your wheeled vehicle." Not "walking next to your horse." Not walking next to your ATV, your truck, etc. It is disingenuous to say that the selectboard voted to approve wheeled vehicles as long as riders had dismounted. The stated purpose of the signs was to keep the trails as "walking only" until certain issues could be resolved.

Todd's response validated my, and Deb's, concerns: namely, that as more bikers are introduced to the trails in our area by way of the bike events being promoted, more bikers NOT associated with any event will be going out on the trails. The fact that these bikers were NOT associated with Todd's (or anyone else's) event is exactly our point.

As for "sensitivity to the community" I fail to see how pushing your neighbors to accept your vision of "community" when they are clearly opposed to your agenda constitutes "sensitivity." The majority of abutting landowners have made it clear, repeatedly, that they are against increased trail activity, particularly in those cases where trails are uncomfortably close to private dwellings.

During the initial discussions about trails usage I endeavored to remain open to multiple proposals as to the best use of the trails in our town; I have been approached by people representing multiple points of view, and have listened respectfully to them all. It saddens me that this issue has become so divisive, and to be a part of that divisiveness; however, it is difficult not to feel that we (abutting landowners) are being steamrolled by a special interest group. If, as Todd says, bike events are about building community, perhaps paying more attention to the concerns of the existing community would be prudent.

Respectfully,

Lori Berger

9/22 – Liz York

My comment is a general one: I think the Trails Committee, the Planning Commission, and ultimately the Selectboard should adopt an ordinance or policy of general applicability for all Legal Trails. The top half of the draft recommendation is a great example. I think that, similar to what you've done in the Class IV recommended policy, the above groups should add a section that delegates authority to make individualized determinations on trail closures and restrictions in response to seasonal and other conditions to a standing group in town such as the Conservation Commission or a permanent Trails Committee. You can double-check with Paul Gillies, but I think it is best practice to have one set of general rules for the entire class of town right-of-way. I don't think policies or ordinances are places to

set micro-rules for each and every different trail or road. The bottom half of the recommendation is a good example, instead, of data and input that can be passed on to the body that makes individualized decisions, but I don't think a laundry list of all the trails with different rules for each makes for a well drafted ordinance or policy.

I will also take this opportunity to repeat what some others have also suggested: at least with respect to the Legal Trails, where some major losses of historical use are on the table, the better course may be for the Planning Commission and Selectboard to put together a proposed ordinance or policy that should then be voted on at Town Meeting as a warned article. If Tunbridge residents are going to lose some or all use of their Legal Trails, it should come at the hands of their fellow voters.

Thanks, as always, for considering my input!

Liz

9/23 – John Echeverria

As I mentioned at the PC meeting last Wednesday, I have an idea to offer in response to your inquiry about “flexibility,” but did not have a chance to present this idea at the meeting. I have previously discussed this option with the former chair of the trails committee and several other members of the trails committee and the planning commission.

The idea is to route bicycles on a new forest path on the Dodge farm that would proceed from Orchard road, through the woods along the northern end of the Dodge Farm property, connect with the Baptist Hill Trail below the segment of that trail that bisects the pasture and contains wetlands, and proceed to the Strafford-Tunbridge road. Bikers could then take a left on the Strafford-Tunbridge road and proceed for about a hundred yards on that road to regain a dirt road, Moody Road. At least some travel on paved road is part of virtually every long ride in Tunbridge, and this would be no different. However, it might be possible to expand the shoulder along this stretch of the Strafford-Tunbridge road to enhance the safety of this option. This new trail segment would provide an interesting off road, in the woods experience. It would provide a link in a continuous almost entirely off-paved-road bike trail from the head of Orchard Road connecting to Moody Road. It would avoid sending bicycle traffic through the middle of the Dodge Farm and Landgoes Farm. If it were devoted exclusively to bikes (as we would prefer), this trail segment would avoid conflicts with other users.

I think this trail is feasible. Wetlands, and class 2 wetlands in particular could apparently be avoided. The trail would cross at least two small streams, which might entail some cost and trigger some regulatory review. We would regret the adverse impacts on wildlife of constructing yet one more trail through woodlands, but would accept these impacts as a way of resolving the conflict. One potential problem is that I understand that Aaron Laroque, whose land abuts the lower portion of the Baptist Hill trail, has expressed opposition (like all of the other landowners affected by these various trails!) to opening Baptist Hill trail to bicycles. I do not fully understand the basis for his opposition because his house is some distance from the Baptist Hill trail. But that is a potential obstacle, and he might feel even more negatively about routing bicycles on a portion of Baptist Hill trail if he thought it would involve more traffic. Francis Miller is the other abutter of the lower portion of the Baptist Hill road, and I do not

known his views on bicycles. A portion of his driveway is the butt end of the Baptist Hill trail, and that might present another issue.

This idea might be worth further consideration, even at this late point in this process.

John