

To: Tunbridge Planning Commission
From: John Echeverria
Re: Bikes on the Public Legal Trails
Date: March 12, 2021

Most of the presentations this week by advocates of opening the public legal trails to bicycles were unpersuasive because they failed to address the central issue of *why* gaining access to these ROW's in particular, on top of the scores of miles of existing ROW's in town, and other new trails that might be created in the future on private lands, would be valuable in a practical way to bicycle users. I and others have already laid out in detail the many adverse consequences that would follow from opening the public legal trails to bicycle use, and I will not repeat those arguments here. Rather, I will try to analyze the issue from the bicycle user standpoint. Analyzing the issue from that perspective, the affirmative case for opening the trails to bicycle use is very weak indeed.

Falls Hill Trail. The Falls Hill Trail is a short nub off of Falls Hill Road. It is 0.3 miles long. It is a true "trail to nowhere" because the trail dead-ends into Cal Heminway's private property, on which he has said he does not wish to see bicycle use. As a result, anyone going up this trail, and respecting Cal's private property rights, would turn around after 0.3 miles and come back down the hill. Understandably, in all of these discussions, I have not heard any suggestion that gaining bicycle access to this trail segment would have any value for bicycle users.

The Baptist Hill Road. The Baptist Hill Trail trail, in the path of old Baptist Hill Road, runs from the Strafford Road, bisects several neighbors' properties, and then goes through our Dodge Farm, ending approximately at the end of legal Orchard Road. In these discussions, I have repeatedly asserted my understanding – so far without contradiction from or questioning by anyone – that no one has ever attempted to bicycle this trail, and no one has expressed any interest in doing so. As I have explained before, this is no doubt due in part to the physical state of the trail and the conflicts between bicycling and agricultural activity. But from the bicyclist standpoint, the other important point is that the approximate endpoint of the Baptist Hill Trail can be gained just as easily from Orchard Road. Thus, if a bicyclist wants to see the fields and the western view from the Dodge Farm, they can come down the Orchard Road. If a bicyclist wants to reach White Rock, she can come down the Orchard Road, park her bicycle at the White Rock trail head, and then walk up the trail to White Rock. In sum, the Baptist Hill trail would not take bikers anywhere they can't already go.

The Cross Road and the Orchard Road Trails. At least implicitly, what the bicycle advocates seek is bicycle access to two of the four public legal trails, the Cross Road Trail and the Orchard Road Trail. This is illustrated by attached map # 1, which shows the path of the Ranger Enduro ride, a 37-mile loop around Tunbridge. As Kevin Rose has explained, the Enduro ride did not originally include the Cross Road Trail, but the ride did include the Cross

Road Trail in 2019. The Ranger Ride has never included the Orchard Road Trail. When riders on the Enduro ride come to the end of County Road, they turn right and go down the Strafford Road and then turn left onto Moody Road. However, the organizers of the Ranger ride have reportedly expressed an interest in using the Orchard Road Trail if it were opened for bicycle use.

The critical point for present purposes is that the viability of the 37-mile Enduro ride (or the use of any smaller portion of the loop) does not depend on access to either the Cross Road Trail or the Orchard Road Trail. In the past the ride has been organized several times without the use of *either* trail. In the future, the ride could be run without going on either trail; the use of the Cross Road Trail in the future can be avoided by directing bicycles up the Monarch Hill Road (rather than up Whitney Hill Road and then over to Monarch Hill via the Cross Road Trail). Under any configuration, a lengthy bike ride through Tunbridge involves some segments on paved road. Bicycle advocates apparently seek to maximize the use of dirt roads as opposed to paved roads. However, keeping bicycles off these two legal trails means only a marginal change in paved surface while preserving the integrity of the Enduro ride as a whole.

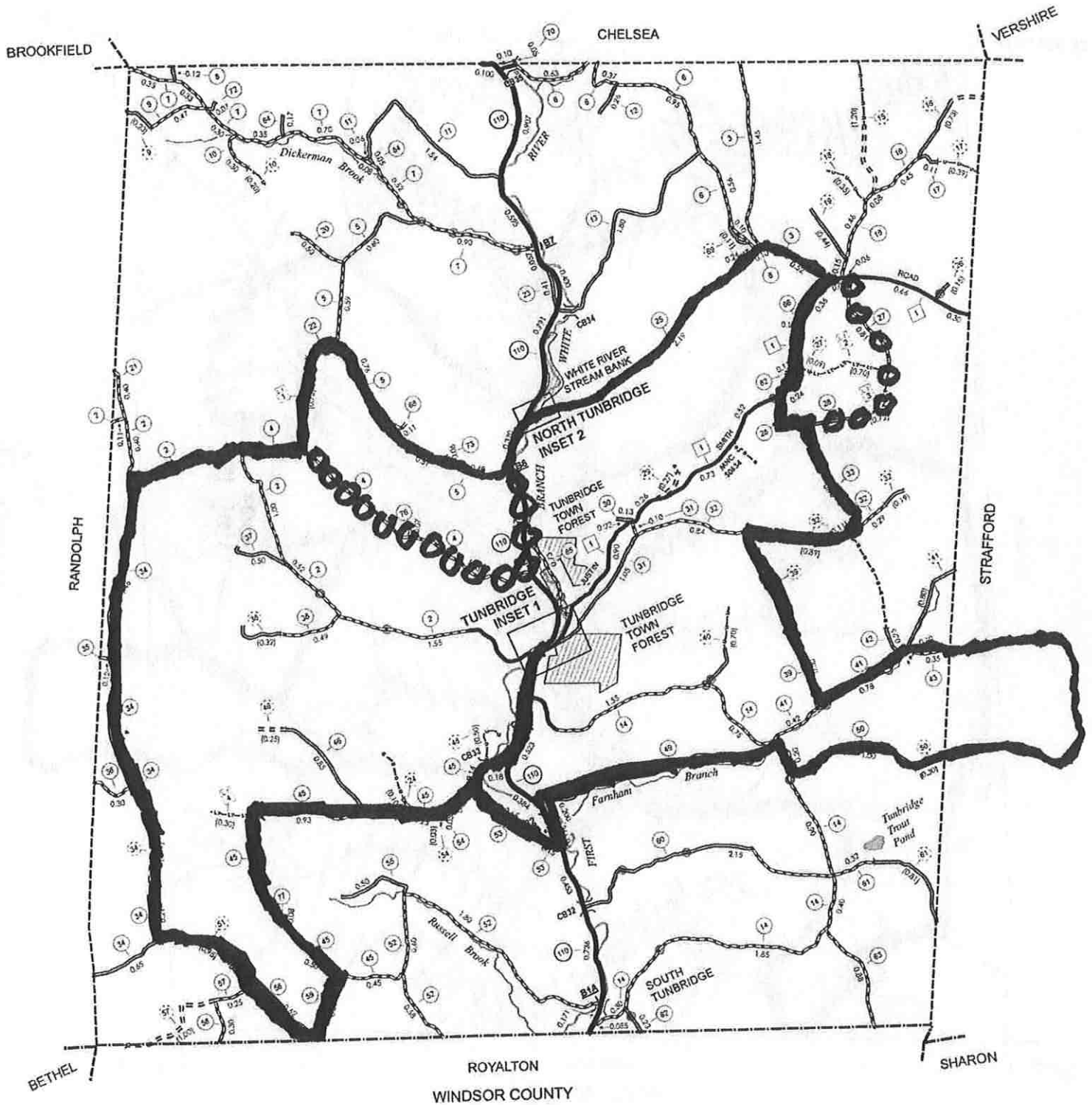
Of course, the ROW's available for bicycle use in Tunbridge are not limited to the path of the Enduro ride. Attached map # 2 shows some of the many other public dirt roads that are open for bicycle use in Tunbridge and that could be knitted together in a wide variety of ways to provide lengthy trail rides without sacrificing the legal public trails to bicycle use.

Finally, bicycle advocates continue to overlook the potential to form cooperative relationships with private landowners willing to grant bicycle access to their land when they can do so without sacrificing the use and enjoyment of their private property. The Tri-Town Trail Travelers have built a large network of snow machine trails almost entirely based on voluntary arrangements with private landowners. In Strafford, significant portions of the town's extensive public trails system – created almost entirely on private lands with landowner agreement – are available for bicycle use. The option of working in a cooperative way with willing landowners has an almost unlimited potential for expanding bicycling opportunities in Tunbridge without inflicting the damage that would be caused by opening these two public legal trails to bicycle use.

Thank you for your consideration.

GRAVEL ENDURO 2019 #1

37 Miles



GRAVEL ENDURO 2019 #2

37 Miles

