



## **Meeting Minutes - January 17, 2013**

**5:00 PM**

**Manchester Town Hall**

Commissioners Present: Charles Edson, Suzy dePeyster, Chris Morrow, Walt Klinger, Janet Hurley, Rick Kelley, Lee Krohn, Charlie Rockwell, Phil Chapman, Paul Myers, Bruce Lierman, Dan Monks

Others Present: George Lerrigo, Dick Pembroke, John Cullinan, Wendy Woods, Bill Badger

BCRC Staff: Jim Sullivan, Jim Henderson, Mark Anders, Michael Batchner, Bill Colvin, Alex Formanek

Meeting called to order at 5:32 PM.

### **I. Approval of Minutes / November 8, 2012**

Motion ( Myers ): Approve Minutes as presented. Second by Krohn. Passed unanimously.

### **II. Forest Stewardship Report**

Jim Sullivan presented an overview of the Forest Stewardship planning project recently completed by the Commission. The report is available at the BCRC's website:

<http://bcrcvt.org/documents/BCRCForestStewardshipReport.pdf>.

The report provides a great amount of detail about forest resources in the region, identifies resources that are highly valued by residents (economic, recreational, wildlife, water resources, scenic,...), potential threats to those resources, and existing and new strategies to encourage conservation and effective utilization of the most important forest resources. Commissioners were urged to inform local officials and planning commissions in their communities about the report so that the information can be used at municipal level. People seeking more information should contact Jim Henderson or Jim Sullivan at the BCRC.

### **III. NY/VT Passenger Rail Study**

Jim Sullivan provided an overview of the history of rail planning over the past 15 years in the region. He then introduced Mark Anders, BCRC's Transportation Program Manager, who presented the project purpose and need statement, information on the existing rail system, alternatives analyzed, potential rail station/platform locations, and capital and operating costs. Much of the information presented can be found at the project's website:

[http://www.ny-vt-passengerrail.org/documents/meetings/public/12-2012/Public%20Meeting%204%20Presentation\\_Final\\_12102012.pdf](http://www.ny-vt-passengerrail.org/documents/meetings/public/12-2012/Public%20Meeting%204%20Presentation_Final_12102012.pdf)

Anders introduced Alex Formanek, a Bennington College student working with BCRC for the current field work term, who is helping analyze and support the rail planning effort.

Anders discussed the difficulty of making the connection between Bennington County and the rail station in Rensselaer. Alternatives included in the study:

- (1) New service from Rensselaer.
- (2) Reroute existing Ethan Allen service through Vermont (same route as new service, but removes one existing train through eastern NY).

Specific information was presented on travel time to/from Manchester and Bennington to Rensselaer. Also ridership forecasts developed as part of the study => estimates from consultant study of about 30 people per day to/from the region.

Capital costs to initiate the service are in the neighborhood of \$120 million. Operating costs are approximately \$3 million less for alternative #2 because it does not involve running a new train.

Station location concepts were discussed. It was noted that the location and designs are significantly affected by FRA requirements.

Wendy Woods, Southwestern Vermont Rail Corridor Committee, presented additional information on possible platform locations, especially the site in Manchester. Questions were raised about the viability of the site design for the Manchester location - George Lerrigo (also on the SVRCC) noted that the site plan was preliminary and that changes would be made. Lerrigo also discussed the North Bennington station, noting that the existing station couldn't be used for boarding, but could be used for passenger waiting with a platform across the street. Also some recent changes to parking lot plans at the stations were noted as well.

Charlie Rockwell questioned the size of the parking lots based on estimated ridership. Alex Formanek noted that the station and parking requirements are Amtrak requirements. Lerrigo added that the consultant's ridership figures significantly underestimate the numbers because they do not adequately consider the strong hospitality industry in our area. Lerrigo also talked about how implementation of the project would correct years of deferred maintenance on the region's rail system.

Woods noted that the ridership also hasn't fully considered economic growth that would be driven by the train.

Formanek presented information on ridership growth in several other new Amtrak services that have greatly exceeded preliminary estimates.

Rick Kelly asked further questions about ridership and the affect of the cost of the service to potential passengers. Much discussion about costs, funding, and alternative modes ensued.

Upon question from Chris Morrow, Woods discussed next steps. SVRRC currently is accepting letters of support from area towns. Once the report is submitted to FRA the project will be "shovel ready" for future funding.

Lerrigo stated that there is a significant amount of federal funding available - - some states have not used their rail funding.

Another question was raised regarding ridership on existing Ethan Allen line in Vermont? What would the affect be of dropping Saratoga on the Ethan Allen line? Formanek provided considerably more information about existing and proposed ridership on the Ethan Allen line (and/or new service to Bennington County).

Woods estimated construction could be completed within 3-4 years.

**Motion (Kelley). BCRC draft a letter in support of the rail project and re-establishment of passenger rail service to the region. Second by dePeyster. Passed unanimously.**

#### **IV. EDA Disaster Relief Grant**

Bill Colvin described the recent grant that was awarded to BCRC and WRC to support economic development efforts in the region. The work in our region will be a cooperative effort with BCRC, BCIC, Chambers of Commerce, ACCD, VTrans, and other groups.

Project areas include:

- Business resource recovery offices located in Wilmington and Brattleboro. Assistance can be provided to any business in Bennington or Windham Counties.
- Creation of a southern Vermont Sustainable Marketing Program.
- Support for downtown and village center economic development. BCRC to play a major role. Helping with village center designations. Mapping resources and creating base maps. Long-term planning for economic development.

Efforts should help support Bennington Region build toward creation of a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

Meeting adjourned at 7:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

James Sullivan  
Director