

Cummings, Valerie

From: Cass, William
Sent: Wednesday, July 1, 2020 5:51 PM
To: Cryans, Michael
Subject: RE: Town of Columbia--Request for meeting re process for seeking use of rail line for hiking trail

Hi Councilor,

I have discussed with our Rail and Transit Bureau and asked them respond to Mr. Baker, even just to let him know we are working on a definitive answer or guidance. I will check if they've talked. If they haven't followed up, I will touch base with him.

William Cass, P.E.
Assistant Commissioner
New Hampshire Department of Transportation
PO Box 483, 7 Hazen Drive
Concord NH 03302-0482
271-1486

From: Cryans, Michael <Michael.Cryans@nh.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, July 01, 2020 11:08 AM
To: Cass, William <William.Cass@dot.nh.gov>
Subject: Fwd: Town of Columbia--Request for meeting re process for seeking use of rail line for hiking trail

Bob,

Were you able to reach back to Bob Baker regarding the rail line? Please let me know!

Mike

From: "Bob Baker" [REDACTED]
Subject: Fwd: Town of Columbia--Request for meeting re process for seeking use of rail line for hiking trail
Date: 12 June 2020 09:09
To: "Winters, Shelley" <Shelley.Winters@dot.nh.gov>
Cc: "Cryans, Michael" <Michael.Cryans@nh.gov>

EXTERNAL: Do not open attachments or click on links unless you recognize and trust the sender.

Correcting typo in Administrator Winters email address.

Alan Robert Baker

[REDACTED]
Columbia NH 03590
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

-----Original Message-----

From: Bob Baker [REDACTED]

To: Michael.Cryans@NH.Gov <Michael.Cryans@NH.Gov>

Cc: shelly.winters@dot.nh.gov <shelly.winters@dot.nh.gov>; [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Sent: Fri, Jun 12, 2020 9:05 am

Subject: Fwd: Town of Columbia--Request for meeting re process for seeking use of rail line for hiking trail

Dear Councilor Cryans:

Thanks your for returning my call last evening. For the past year we have been exploring development of a non-motorized rail trail here in Columbia along an unused portion of a State of NH rail line that parallels the Connecticut River. This exploratory work has been approved by the Selectboard of Columbia and I am copying them on this email along with Administrator Winters at the DOT.

The rail trail would be approximately 2.5 miles long and would connect two town properties as well as the historic Columbia Covered Bridge. A draft map of the proposed trail is attached. Our vision is that the rail trail would be used by hikers and pedal bikers; and that it would be open to the public including residents of, and visitors to, the area. It would open up a beautiful and quiet portion of the Connecticut River valley to sight seeing, wildlife watching and a very safe alternative to walking or biking on the shoulders of Route 3. It would also be a big attraction to tourism efforts in the area delivering plenty of safe parking and having the Columbia Covered Bridge as a feature of the experience.

The rail line itself is owned by the State and it has not been legally "abandoned" but it is literally unused and in terrible condition. It has not been maintained in many years and the rail tracks have been totally removed near the covered bridge. The rail line leads nowhere to the north of the proposed trial. It dead ends in Colebrook where all track has been removed and its use has been turned into an ATV trail connecting Colebrook with Stewartstown to the north. It was our belief that the State would support our efforts in Columbia, but we have not gotten to the point where we have had a clear response to our modest request for support and assistance in getting the rail line reclassified to abandoned status. A site visit was supposed to occur late last year, but that did not happen and then we have had the Covid-19 shut down interruption just as the weather conditions were starting to cooperate and mud season was subsiding.

It is our understanding that the "abandoned" legal status would more accurately reflect the actual status of the rail line; and it would allow us to work with the State for development of the non-motorized use trail. Our modest efforts and e-mail correspondence with the State is set forth below. Nothing has happened since last year and the Covid-19 virus stay at home problem certainly has not helped. Under the new Covid-19 2.0 Order however, we might actually be looking at an opportunity to move forward with socially distanced outdoor exploration of what needs to be done!

We have two requests. We would ask (1) for your support of the project and (2) for your involvement in our request that the State move forward in developing and giving a response to our request for assistance and willingness to have the rail line abandoned from the Columbia Bridge Road area north to the old Columbia Town Hall property near Colebrook for use as a non-motorized rail trail. We recognize that there are legal processes/applications that must be followed, but we don't want to start down those roads unless we know that the State supports the project concept.

Thank you in advance for any help and assistance that you can render.

Best regards,

Bob Baker

Alan Robert Baker

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

-----Original Message-----

From: Bob Baker [REDACTED]

To: Shelley.Winters@dot.nh.gov

Cc: [REDACTED] Louis.Barker@dot.nh.gov

Sent: Thu, Nov 21, 2019 3:44 pm

Subject: Re: Town of Columbia--Request for meeting re process for seeking use of rail line for hiking trail

Thanks Shelley. I am away for the Thanksgiving holiday week but am generally available after December 4th. I am looking forward to meeting with Lou.

Best regards, Bob Baker

Alan Robert Baker

[REDACTED]
Columbia NH 03590

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

-----Original Message-----

From: Winters, Shelley <Shelley.Winters@dot.nh.gov>

To: 'Bob Baker' [REDACTED]

Cc: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Barker, Louis <Louis.Barker@dot.nh.gov>

Sent: Thu, Nov 21, 2019 10:26 am

Subject: RE: Town of Columbia--Request for meeting re process for seeking use of rail line for hiking trail

Bob,

NHDOT Railroad Planner Lou Barker is planning a similar site visit to Whitefield, so when that date is set, Lou will reach out to you to conduct a Columbia site visit the same day. Ideally this would be scheduled in the next few weeks. Lou is copied on this email.

Thank you,
Shelley

From: Bob Baker [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, October 7, 2019 2:29 PM
To: Winters, Shelley <Shelley.Winters@dot.nh.gov>
Cc: [REDACTED] Barker, Louis <Louis.Barker@dot.nh.gov>
Subject: Re: Town of Columbia--Request for meeting re process for seeking use of rail line for hiking trail

EXTERNAL: Do not open attachments or click on links unless you recognize and trust the sender.

Dear Administrator Winters:

I was wondering if any opportunity to have a meeting about the proposed Columbia hiking trail can be scheduled in the coming weeks. Please advise. Thank you.

Best regards, Bob Baker

Alan Robert Baker
[REDACTED]
Columbia NH 03590
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

-----Original Message-----

From: Bob Baker [REDACTED] >
To: Shelley.Winters <Shelley.Winters@dot.nh.gov>
Cc: ericstohl [REDACTED] donaldwardcampbell [REDACTED] louis.barker <louis.barker@dot.nh.gov>
Sent: Fri, Aug 16, 2019 10:28 am
Subject: Re: Town of Columbia--Request for meeting re process for seeking use of rail line for hiking trail

Dear Administrator Winters:

Thank you so much for your email below. It is totally understandable how the hiking trail request got mixed in with the ATV request. Nevertheless, your response was completely timely since it arrived before my meeting with the Columbia Selectboard last Wednesday evening.

I can report that the Town is definitely interested in pursuing the proposed project and in accepting your kind offer to meet with your staff to discuss viable options for pursuing the hiking trail request. Given the guidance received and our communications with Ed Jeffrey, the Town has decided to limit its request to the portion of the rail line that is currently out of service running south from the old Town Hall property on the north side of Simms Stream. That way, the old town hall, the new town office property on the Connecticut River and the Columbia covered bridge over the Connecticut River could all be connected with a hiking trail limited to non-motorized uses.

I will be away for the next few weeks but generally have availability for a meeting anytime September 9, 10 or 11 or on any day after September 23rd. Please let me know what would work best from your staff's perspective. Thank you again.

Best regards,

Bob Baker

Alan Robert Baker

[REDACTED]
Columbia NH 03590
[REDACTED]

-----Original Message-----

From: Winters, Shelley <Shelley.Winters@dot.nh.gov>

To: 'Bob Baker' [REDACTED]

Subject: RE: Town of Columbia--Request for meeting re process for seeking use of rail line for hiking trail

Bob,
I apologize for the delay in responding. I am waiting for information from our attorney relative to interim (non-rail) use of state-owned railroad lines in other portions of Columbia & Colebrook (as requested by the Towns) that have NOT been officially abandoned through the Surface Transportation Board as that is a required (legal) proceeding to change the status of a railroad line and your inquiry was accidentally intermixed with that request given it was also within the Town of Columbia. That was my gaffe in lumping your inquiry with the other Town inquiry.

I should have quickly responded and echoed what Ed Jeffrey (NH Central Railroad) had stated, that a portion of the line you inquired about is currently active and used by the NH Central Railroad. Therefore the active section is not open to consideration unless the trail could be developed in adjacent railroad right of way according to the DOT's design standards & as described in materials relative to rail-trails on active or inactive railroad lines.

I understand in the interim period that you have corresponded with my colleague, Lou Barker, and NH Central Railroad's Ed Jeffrey and for the benefit of all, I have attached those emails which contain some of the documents alluded to. Again, any pending request to use a portion of the state-owned railroad line would require a rail-trail agreement between NHDOT and the Town (Lou Barker provided guidance relative to that) and depending on how the Town proposes to use the line, this request (just as the other Columbia-Colebrook request) may also be subject to the same attorney general guidance relative to federal Surface Transportation Board approvals for non-rail use.

Apologies, again, for the delay in response. If still appropriate, given the above & attached information, our staff could meet with you and/or the Town to discuss viable options for the proposed hiking trail.

Thank you,
Shelley

Shelley Winters

Administrator, Bureau of Rail & Transit
New Hampshire Department of Transportation
PO Box 483
Concord, NH 03302-0483
Tel: (603) 271-2468

From: Bob Baker [REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, July 25, 2019 12:39 PM

To: Winters, Shelley

Subject: Town of Columbia--Request for meeting re process for seeking use of rail line for hiking trail

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Dear Bureau Administrator Winters:

I write to you as a local retired lawyer interested in working to establish a public hiking trail connecting three town owned properties in the Town of Columbia. The properties are all located on or near the Connecticut River. I have cleared this concept with the Selectmen of Columbia on an informal basis and my current mission is to determine whether it can be feasibly brought about from the perspective of the State agencies that would have to be involved.

We are trying to determine the prospects for using the old rail line owned by the State of NH north of the Stratford-Columbia town line for connecting all of the Town of Columbia properties. I am told by the Bureau of Trails that your Bureau would have to be contacted since the rail line in Columbia along the river has not technically been abandoned. From my observations, however, much of that rail line has been practically abandoned in the sense that the rails and ties have been dismantled (the Columbia Bridge Road crossing is an example) or have eroded or deteriorated to the point where they will no longer support rail traffic (as is the case where the rail line abuts property of Don and Stacey Campbell located several thousand feet to the south of Columbia Bridge).

Could you please help us with this inquiry by giving me the name(s) of those in your Bureau who should be contacted. I would be pleased to come to Concord to meet with you or your staff to explain the details developed to date and to learn the processes that might have to be completed to see if this rail to hiking trail proposal can be furthered. It would be a wonderful recreational addition to the Town of Columbia and to tourism attractions in the Upper Connecticut River Valley running through our Town. Thanks in advance for your response.

Sincerely,

Bob Baker

Alan Robert Baker

[REDACTED]
Columbia NH 03590

Tel. [REDACTED]

Mr. Baker, Thank you for your inquiry. The railroad line we are discussing is considered active, but out of service. The State and New Hampshire Central Railroad still have rail service obligations with the Surface Transportation Board.

For discussion purposes I am attaching the Bureau guidelines for Rail with Trail Agreements and Trail Agreement on abandoned sections.

Lou Barker
Railroad Planner
NH Department of Transportation
Bureau of Rail & Transit
603-271-2425

From: Bob Baker [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, August 09, 2019 9:53 AM
To: Barker, Louis
Subject: Fwd: Town of Columbia--Request for meeting re process for seeking use of rail line for hiking trail

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Sorry wrong email address used in forwarded message below. Hopefully I have it right this time.

From: Bob Baker [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Sent: Fri, Aug 9, 2019 9:50 am
Subject: Fwd: Town of Columbia--Request for meeting re process for seeking use of rail line for hiking trail

Dear Lou:

Thanks so much for taking my call today. Below is a copy of my email to Shelley Winters briefly describing the concept and potential for using the existing rail line in Columbia NH as a public hiking trail along the CT River connecting the three town owned properties. Any help you can provide me in pointing out the process and filings that would have to be done for such a project to receive consideration would be greatly appreciated.

This is at a very early stage in development, but I believe it has great potential as a major resource for our Town and the entire area. Thanks again for your help.

Best regards, Bob Baker

Alan Robert Baker
[REDACTED]
Columbia NH 03590
[REDACTED]

-----Original Message-----

From: Bob Baker [REDACTED]
To: shelly.winters <shelley.winters@dot.nh.gov>
Cc: ericstohl [REDACTED]
Sent: Thu, Jul 25, 2019 12:38 pm
Subject: Town of Columbia--Request for meeting re process for seeking use of rail line for hiking trail

Dear Bureau Administrator Winters:

I write to you as a local retired lawyer interested in working to establish a public hiking trail connecting three town owned properties in the Town of Columbia. The properties are all located on or near the Connecticut River. I have cleared this concept with the Selectmen of Columbia on an informal basis and my current

mission is to determine whether it can be feasibly brought about from the perspective of the State agencies that would have to be involved.

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Sincerely,

Bob Baker

Alan Robert Baker

[REDACTED]
Columbia NH 03590
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

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Good morning all,

Just a quick clarification the section of line between MP 2.0 Columbia / North stratford Town Line and MP 6.5 Columbia Sand and Gravel is not (OOS) Out of Service and is still a active Rail Line, north of Columbia Sand and Gravel / Beaver Brook to Colebrook is (OOS) Out of Service.

Best regards,

Edward W. Jeffrey

Present/COO

New Hampshire Central Railroad, Inc.

2283 US Route 3

PO Box 165

North Stratford, NH 03590

O (603) 922-3400

F (603) 922-9058

C (561) -908-4847

ewj@myfairpoint.net

On Fri, 9 Aug 2019 14:02:00 +0000, "Barker, Louis" <Louis.Barker@dot.nh.gov> wrote:

Mr. Baker, Thank you for your inquiry. The railroad line we are discussing is considered active, but out of service. The State and New Hampshire Central Railroad still have rail service obligations with the Surface Transportation Board.

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Railroad Planner
NH Department of Transportation
Bureau of Rail & Transit
603-271-2425

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From: Bob Baker [REDACTED]
To: lou.barker <lou.barker@dot.nh.gov>
Cc: ericstohl [REDACTED]
Sent: Fri, Aug 9, 2019 9:50 am
Subject: Fwd: Town of Columbia--Request for meeting re process for seeking use of rail line for hiking trail

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Alan Robert Baker
[REDACTED]
Columbia NH 03590
[REDACTED]

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From: Bob Baker [REDACTED]

To: shelly.winters <shelly.winters@dot.nh.gov>

Cc: ericstohl [REDACTED]

Sent: Thu, Jul 25, 2019 12:38 pm

Subject: Town of Columbia--Request for meeting re process for seeking use of rail line for hiking trail

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Sincerely,

Bob Baker

Alan Robert Baker

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Columbia NH 03590
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