

“More Than Just a Train Wreck” Planning Group Meeting – Monday 3 Feb, 6 PM

Attending:

E. Brown, S. Stroud – National Parks Service; T. Penn-Gesek – Dir. Planning & Development/Project Leader; K. Durlach – Chair, Trails Committee; C. Obert – Trails, Historical Society, EDC; D. Blanchette – J&D Engineering; T. Chase – Historical Society; P. Provost – Trails, Historical Society; L. Munshower – Dir. Recreation; D. Ostrowski – Trails; A. Kneeland – Putnam Trails; L. Graff – TLGV

- NPS consultants Brown & Stroud came in the afternoon for a tour of the museum rooms at the TMHS admin. building, to get more context for the events of the train wreck, and to get a sense of possible assets to consider for connectivity.
- Roles & purpose of the Rivers, Trails & Conservation (RTC) assistance program: a non-monetary award. Assistance is viewed as an equal partnership between the NPS advisors and the planning group. NPS Advisors are able to assist in the following areas:
 - Meeting planning & facilitation
 - Visioning, goal-setting, work planning
 - Bringing in new (under-represented) voices
 - Community engagement
 - Capacity building
 - Strategic planning
 - Conceptual design
 - Funding strategies
 - Telling stories/creating places (interpretive strategies, including public art/wayfinding design)
- A trails-user survey is referenced, which may have been the recent NECCOG survey. Can the results be obtained?
- Brown & Stroud lead a brainstorming exercise to identify the Vision, Mission, Barriers, Goals and Opportunities for the Train Wreck Park project.
- Vision:
 - Obert: a destination point focused on the three known points of interest (train wreck site, Tri-State Marker and...? Cart Bridge?)
 - Durlach: create a self-guided tour at a defined location which would work in concert with the Air Line Trail
 - Chase: Improved ability for visitors to visualize the story of the train wreck (wayfinding artifacts)
 - Durlach: two means of discovery – incidental discovery while hiking (on site) & intentional discovery while planning a visit (online)
 - Stroud: overarching vision concepts can be articulated as connectivity, ease of access (site & information), visualization/understanding of context, gateway to other features in Thompson and the region.

- Accessibility is articulated as a high priority. Graff & Kneeland affirm that they have been working on accessibility for CT Trails
 - Blanchette points out that the train wreck site itself is close to satisfying ADA requirements. The Tri-State Marker would have difficulty meeting those goals. Durlach points out that different users have different
- Mission:
 - Design for train wreck site interpretive tools
 - Additional wayfinding tools to boost connectivity to Tri-State Marker portion of trail
 - Improved connectivity to Pulaski Trail/RI trails
 - Consistency of narrative style & presentation
 - Improvements to Tri-State Marker site (e.g. a bench or picnic table adjacent to the marker, to allow a hiker to rest after reaching the site)
- Barriers:
 - Physical access (specifically for impaired users)
 - Funding/maintenance/vandalism – perennial problems for all trails
 - Abutter cooperation
- Stakeholder Analysis (Other participants who should be involved):
 - General public – primary responsibility to this group is to be broadly informative, e.g. via website page or other easily accessed forward facing platforms
 - “Consulting” members of the public are those with a more specific interest in trails use. Reach via a more interactive platform (surveys)
 - Next engagement level would be those wanting to be a part of the planning process, but are not yet engaged. How can they be reached/drawn in?
 - Collaborators (planning group+ others). Who are other potential partners not yet involved? Suggestions: The Speedway, abutters, user groups (hiking/cycling/equestrian clubs, etc), Thompson Business Association, state archaeologist, Air Line Trail 12-town taskforce. We should identify gaps in the knowledge and expertise of the planning group and invite participation
 - Empowered stakeholders = those with authority to approve/fund/act on the final project. Municipal/state level, e.g. CT DEEP.
- A coordination of links on websites is suggested (town/TLGV/Recreation/Historical Society) to drive interest in the project as it progresses.
- The NPS consultants will take the posters from the brainstorming session and consolidate to share with the planning group.
- Next Meeting will be Monday 2 March. Time of day TBD, but it is suggested that a daytime meeting would be preferable for many participants. NPS consultants may create a google poll to determine the best time? In months where Trails meets, the planning group will meet ahead of the committee, 5:30-7 p.m.