“More Than Just a Train Wreck” Planning Group Meeting – Monday 2 March, 1 p.m.

Attending:

Elizabeth Brown, Stephanie Stroud – National Parks Service; Tyra Penn-Gesek – Dir. Planning & Development/Project Leader; Karen Durlach – Chair, Trails Committee; Charlie Obert – Trails, Historical Society, EDC, Branding; Tom Chase – Historical Society; Paul Provost – Trails, Historical Society; David Ostrowski – Trails; LyAnn Graff – TLGV; Brian Loffredo – Trails, EDC, Branding

Welcome, Introductions & Updates (T. Penn)

February 2nd Meeting Review:

• T. Chase sent an email to the CT State Archaeologist. Nicholas Bellantoni is currently acting in that capacity, while he assists recently appointed archaeologist Sarah Sportman as she transitions into the office. Bellantoni’s email response in the thread includes the following questions: Will the roundhouse be affected by the parking lot and other developments? Will the historic train station be avoided? Bellantoni states that CT SHPO needs to conduct a review for impacts on cultural resources before any project work is done. He also suggests an archaeological survey may be appropriate. T. Chase will continue to correspond with Bellantoni/Sportman as the project progresses.

12 Town Task Force Air Line Trail State Park Project Meeting updates:

• Jeanne Davis, the lead on that project, is expected to send an update with task force goals soon, based on the results of the meeting of 20 Feb. At this point, the next meeting of the full task force is anticipated in June. Unclear if the sub-committees will be meeting prior to that point.

• K. Durlach & S. Stroud were on the Conservation/Environmental subcommittee at the 20 Feb meeting. Having an Environmental Review Team assess each town’s proposed development of its section of the Air Line Trail was named as a priority.

• C. Obert and E. Brown were on the Advocacy subcommittee. The general discussion in that group was around how to promote the trail and its assets to the community & activate the trail more fully. Maureen Nicholson of Pomfret is referenced as having a well-thought-out master plan that includes proposed layouts and interpretive stations. Connectivity to MA via Webster & Dudley is raised as a goal. Bruce Donald may be able to assist with strategies for connectivity, as the contact for the East Coast Greenway. C. Obert points out that Webster Bank may be a good organization to approach for future fundraising, since they are already a sponsor of the Hartford Marathon’s RiMaCon Relay, which passes through Thompson on the Airline Trail.

• Several participants from the 20 Feb meeting come back to the topic of “storytelling” as key to the concept of developing the Train Wreck site and linking it to other existing assets. Examples of the “Z-Card” trail map which EDC and Branding have generally endorsed as a marketing tool are passed around for consideration. EDC has voted to allocate $4.5k in FY20
and projected $4k in FY21 to produce some kind of events/outdoor recreation promotional map, utilizing the Z-Cards and a seasonal events mailer. A request for design proposals will probably go out soon, to enable encumbrance of the FY20 funds before the end of June.

- K. Durlach and P. Provost confirm that in all the groups, public bathroom facilities and quality signs were consistent topics of interest.

**Vision, Mission, Goals (S. Stroud & E. Brown)**

- Stroud & Brown provide handouts that include a sample vision statement for consideration by the planning group: *Thompson is a statewide destination for outdoor recreation and history, marked by regionally connected trail networks, bustling community amenities, and a thriving local economy. The trail town is a gateway to the state and region, with an interconnected network of resources that are enriching and accessible across user groups, making Thompson a regional hub in which people want to explore, recreate and stay*. The group is invited to provide feedback on the vision statement, possibly at a future meeting.

- It is suggested that the first deliverable of the planning group will be a Connectivity Plan/Action Plan. Some examples from other “Trail Towns” are passed around. The plan would be useful in seeking grants and publicizing the project as it moves forward. T. Penn also points out that such a document could work in close conjunction with the update to the Plan of Conservation and Development, which is due to be completed by the end of calendar-year 2020.

- Highlighted points from the Vision/Mission/Goals handout are those which have consistently been identified as priorities by the planning group: “Create opportunities to interpret local history, including a plan for trailside interpretation” and “Create a product to communicate the value of the Thompson train wreck site to CT DEEP and DoT to secure funding for future interpretive vision”.

- Stroud & Brown present a slideshow: Thompson Trails Connectivity Action Plan, which serves to define a “Trail Town” and provides context for Thompson moving forward. Discussion points prompted by the slideshow include: the goal of having a frictionless relationship between area residents and potential outside trail users; inventory & promotion of local lodging options (camping, Air B&B, conventional lodging); examples of “embedded view” signs are shown & generally liked by the group. Durability of trail signs is brought up as a concern. L. Graf points out that TLGV had some boat launch signs fabricated 5-6 years ago which seem to be holding up very well.

- An important slide delineates responsibilities of the NPS advisors: to build relationships with stakeholders in Thompson, along the Air Line Trail and beyond; and site assessment of trails, visitor use surveys, CT Trail Census data, community asset mapping & creation of the action plan. Key responsibilities for the planning group are identified as: Connecting Town to Trail; Development (community wide); Marketing.

- What Can We Do Now (slide title)? Short term deliverables are generally agreed to be: a trail map/brochure (possibly the earlier referred to ZCard and mailer– would require collaboration with Branding/EDC). S. Stroud raises the possibility of accessing some NPS funds for a one-time arts/cultural/history event at the Train Wreck site. Possibilities of an art installation or
performance are discussed. T. Penn proposes a song-writing competition to commemorate the Great East Thompson Train Wreck, possibly to coincide with CT Trails Day, possibly as a stand-alone event. S. Stroud points out that piggybacking onto existing events is generally a good strategy. IF THIS IS THE CHOICE MADE BY THE PLANNING GROUP time is of the essence to hit the deadline for CT Trails day. Funds must be committed before the end of September 20, to coincide with NPS fiscal year. A call for artists, jury criteria, etc will have to be decided in short order. It is suggested that the NPS funds could be used to award the winner of the competition with a professional audio/video recording for the artists’ use & also use on Thompson’s media outlets.

• Other suggestions include curated bike rides, employment of an “artist-in-residence” for an extended period (year on year?).
• Important point: plan for what can be done with currently available resources, or with only modest “stretches”.

Next meeting 6 April, 5 p.m. ahead of the regular Trails Committee meeting.