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Guilderland Pathways Committee

Notes on the public meeting with Jim Donovan of Wilbur Smith Associates

November 9, 2004

This meeting was held as an introduction to the Wilbur Smith study of pathways in the Town, work funded by a grant from the Hudson River Greenway.

Don Csaposs, the Town's "Director of Development" conducted the meeting, attended by Bruce Sherwin, Pat Slavik and Dave Bosworth of the Town Board, Steve Feeney, Chuck Klaer, Jim Sumner, Jan Weston, Lindsay Childs, Marty Gnacik, and a few others, including D. J. Panetta of Johnston Road and several neighbors on Fuller Station Road whose back yards abut the NiMo right-of-way/Fuller Station railbed.

Don began the meeting by observing that the Town Board had received a "compendium of recommendations" on sidewalks and pathways in the Town from the Comprehensive Plan, the McKownville Corridor Study, the Fort Hunter/Carman Road study (done by Wilbur Smith Associates) and the Guilderland Pathways Committee. The Town obtained a grant from the Greenway to take all of the recommendations in these studies and "collate them", conduct a feasibility assessment, and prioritize them. The Greenway was enthusiastic about this grant because this was their first grant to undertake such a synthesis. The Town needed a coherent plan because the collected recommendations in all these studies would cost several million dollars, which the Town doesn't have. Along with guiding Town expenditures in the years to come, the plan will be helpful in seeking external funding. Proposals for projects whose need is well documented in planning studies are strong candidates for funding. (For example, the need for a sidewalk on McKown Road was documented in both the Comprehensive Plan and the McKownville Corridor Study, and that documentation was helpful in obtaining the recent spot improvement grant for that project.)

Jim Donovan of Wilbur Smith Associates, the consultant, will prepare a draft report in approximately 8-10 weeks. When the draft is ready, the Town will hold a public meeting to review the draft, after which a final report will be prepared and submitted to the Town Board. The public meeting on the draft is expected to occur in early January.

Jim Donovan then spoke. He was quite complimentary of the work of the Pathways Committee. He particularly liked the "Walkable Destinations" approach of looking at destinations and how nearby residents could reach them on foot. He won't tear the GPC's work apart, but rather will add a professional perspective to them and tie them in with the Master Plan. He will write a single report that will show how recommendations in all three of the GPC's reports (Sidewalks, Walkable Destinations, and Biking in Guilderland) work together. In particular, he thought it appropriate to integrate the "Biking in Guilderland" study of rural bike routes into an overall biking/walking plan for the Town. He will also look to see if there are missing connections that the GPC may have overlooked, and may ask the GPC for more detail in

certain areas.

The scope of the study does not permit giving detailed cost estimates, but he will give general ("ball park") cost estimates for types of improvements (e.g. sidewalks cost \$30/linear foot, etc.).

He was asked about how to decide prioritization, and responded that he was not sure yet, but that the priorities should be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. Public input on setting priorities would be helpful.

On display at the meeting was a map prepared by the consultant containing the off-road path concepts of the GPC--the Guilderland Greenway loop and connectors, including the Fuller Station railbed/NiMo right-of-way piece, as well as the Thruway bike path concept. The map also showed the locations of the Town's active parks and indicated the locations of some of the Town's recreation sites. It did not include any sidewalks.

Comments from the audience:

Steve Feeney requested that the final map include all lands owned by the Town as set-asides of developments, as well as easements set aside by the Planning Board as pedestrian connectors between neighborhoods. We asked that the map also include school playgrounds, the Pine Bush, and the streams in the Town--the Normans Kill, Hunger Kill, Blockhouse Creek, Kaikout Kill, Black Creek and Bozenkill. (Jan returned to us the sidewalk and greenway maps the GPC had prepared and updated at its September meeting, and we promptly gave them to Mr. Donovan, along with the versions of the Sidewalk Master Plan, Walkable Destinations and Biking reports that we had submitted to the Town Board. Mr. Donovan had been given older versions of these reports.)

D. J. Panetta stated that a sidewalk is desperately needed on Johnston Road. Others agreed. One response was that it is really a County project, and might be done as part of a reconstruction of the road, just as occurred this year on Route 155. (Johnston Road would appear not to need major work for several years--the pavement has lots of thin stress fractures but no patches except on the shoulders.) We wondered if a joint application with the County for a Spot Improvement grant for a sidewalk might be viable. Don said the County wasn't interested in a joint application. Steve thought the project would be too expensive for a Spot and was more appropriate for a TIP.

Two or three residents along Fuller Station Road whose back yards abut (include?) the NiMo ROW/Fuller Station railbed made repeated comments about how all this planning of a bike path along the NiMo ROW had been done without their knowledge, and why weren't they informed? A path would have a whole litany of negative consequences to them. Jan pointed out that the NiMo ROW path had been proposed and discussed at the well-attended public meetings of the Fort Hunter/Carman Road study, so the proposal had received significant public input. The neighbors responded that they had never heard about the FH/CR study. (They don't read the Enterprise or the Spotlight.) Jim and Don said that the proposed path was only a concept at this stage, and would need to be the subject of a detailed engineering study before it was determined to be feasible.

The neighbors wanted to know when the next meeting of the Guilderland Pathways Committee is. We told them, Tuesday, November 23 at 7:30. I expect at least a couple of them will come.