

DRAFT

**Minutes of Connecticut River Assembly Meeting
February 12, 2009**

Attendance:

Members

Joseph Smith, Chairman	Wethersfield
William B. Garner	Enfield
Philip H. Benoit	Rocky Hill
Bill Flagg	South Windsor
George Frick	Middletown
Jeanne C. Dilworth	Portland
Raul DeBrigard	MRPA

Others

Mary Ellen Kowalewski	CRCOG
Jonathan Putnam	Connecticut Heritage Trail, Inc.

Chairman Joseph Smith called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

A Vision for a Connecticut River Trail

Jonathan Putnam, founder of Connecticut Heritage Trail, Inc., presented his organization's vision for creating a multi-use trail along the Connecticut River from Massachusetts to Long Island Sound. He described the Connecticut River as a very special natural resource, which at this time is not adequately acknowledged and is underutilized as a recreations/scenic resource. He has explored the 75 miles of riverfront in Connecticut, documenting existing trails, open space and parks, farms, village centers, historic resources, and areas of exceptional natural beauty. He spoke about other areas of the country that had created bike/trail systems, which have contributed to the economic vitality of the areas, including Providence, Cape Cod, Washington D.C., Maryland and Pittsburgh.

The potential benefits of a Connecticut River Heritage Trail are many: scenic beauty, a site for healthy activity, a way to link communities, conservation of the Connecticut River and adjacent lands, economic development, preservation of historic and archeological features, and a place to enjoy the company of family and friends.

Mr. Putnam has been promoting this idea since 2006, and hopes to reinvigorate the effort with the help of grass-roots support of citizens like the CRA members, and others in the river communities. Members discussed the opportunities and constraints to creating such a trail system. Since active and inactive rail lines provide possible sites for the trail, members discussed the positive and negative aspects of such areas, as well as past difficulties trying to convince state and local officials, and private property owners, that a trail and rail line could be safely co-located. In some areas, existing roadways could

provide ways around physical barriers, or difficult terrain. Where trails already exist, directional signs could be installed to help increase usage of the trail. Members also discussed how residents adjacent to a planned trail often object to such a facility in their back yard, due to fear for strangers passing near their property. Mr. Putnam and others felt that such fears could be overcome in time, as has been evidenced by projects in other parts of the state and country.

The trail could also combine use of boats with walking and biking. Along the southern Connecticut River, the trail could also complement the Connecticut River Valley Railroad.

Mr. Putnam concluded by showing CRA members a map of the envisioned trail. This is a vision that will evolve over time, based on input from municipal and state officials, and interested citizens and property owners. It presented an inspiring picture of what “could be,” if enough people come together to work toward this goal. The CRA encouraged Mr. Putnam to continue his outreach to municipalities, the State and others. They also suggested that he speak to the Connecticut River Gateway Commission. Members thanked Mr. Putnam for his excellent presentation.

Adoption of Minutes

Jeanne Dilworth made and William Garner seconded a motion to adopt the minutes of the December 11, 2008 Connecticut River Assembly meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion of Next Meeting Agenda

Members expressed an interest in continuing to explore the idea of a Connecticut River Heritage Trail introduced tonight. Mary Ellen Kowalewski agreed to have CRCOG’s planning intern work on a map that could integrate the CRA Conservation Zone with natural and historic features, existing trail segments and open space, and some of the ideas presented tonight. This could provide a visual resource, which the members could share with others in their communities. Members also discussed potential future speakers who could elaborate on potential resources that could be linked to a Connecticut River Trail. Ideas included speakers from: Goodwin College (riverfront campus under development), Three Rivers Magnet School, Connecticut Science Center, Connecticut River Museum in Essex, a representative from the Connecticut River Gateway Commission, and the Connecticut River Tourism District.

Other Business

Mary Ellen Kowalewski reported that four towns still have vacant seats on the CRA: East Windsor, Glastonbury, Suffield and Windsor. She will continue to work with these communities to get new representatives.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:55 p.m.