



MASSACHUSETTS RECREATIONAL TRAILS ADVISORY BOARD

January 12, 2021

Remote Meeting

1:00 – 2:00pm

Members Present with Representation:

Tom Chamberland, Chair - Local Land Trust/Non-Profits

Bill Boles – Mountain Biking

Tim Craig – Youth Corps

Joe Geller – Rail Trail Users

Marianne Iarossi – Municipal Trail Planners

Becky Kalagher - Equestrian

Bridget Likely – Hiking

Aaron North – Hiking

Ben Phelps – All Terrain Vehicles

Larry Tucker – Snowmobiling

Mike White – 4-Wheel Drive Clubs

Liaisons:

Amanda Lewis – DCR MassTrails

Libby Knott – DCR MassTrails

Scott Morrill – EOEEA OHV Coordinator

Meeting Minutes:

Welcome

- Approve Minutes from October 13, 2020 Meeting

Tom asked for a motion to accept, which was made by Mike and seconded. Minutes were quickly redistributed when some members said they did not recall receiving the email sent on October 22, 2020. After a short pause for all to have time to review, a verbal vote was taken one-by-one among members present. Minutes from October 13, 2020 were unanimously accepted.

Brief MassTrails Update

- With the application deadline approaching, Amanda and Libby are preparing for the 2021 grant review. Funding this year is approximately \$1.2M for RTP, which has been level-funded for 10 years. State funded grants were supposed to be \$3M in 2020 but ended up less than that; we can expect at least \$2.5M this year. However, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic conditions final budgets are still unknown.

- Amanda has been working on program upgrades this past fall and early winter. These include:
 - An RTP group Grant Agreement Discussion session versus individual calls.
 - A new Grant Initiation Form that captures scope, budget, and any changes to a project since its application, by which grantees are held accountable at project's end.
 - Minor tweaks to contract documentation.
 - Branding documents with MassTrails and RTP logos for a consistent program identity/image.
 - A new Contract Amendment Form.
 - An updated Final Report.
 - A new Two-Page Project Summary Form that will provide a quick snapshot of important project information and images. This can be used both as a standalone document to promote individual project successes, as well as being coupled together with all projects from a grant year in a graphically attractive narrative and summary for the entire grant round.
- Tim asked if there were any projects that did not finish due to pandemic constraints and whether those projects asked for a contract extension. Amanda replied that we reached out to all 2018 RTP projects in September for progress reports and instructed all to ask for an extension if it seemed at all likely they would require one. In response, only eight grantees requested and were granted contract extensions of one year. On the state side, approximately \$400K was not spent by June 30, and was approved for roll over. With all other RTP grants, it was not necessary since they are 2-year grants and have an additional year to finish their projects.

2021 Grant Review Prep

- Libby sent the new Conflict of Interest (COI) Disclosure Form to all MARTAB Members with the meeting invitation. Members were asked to review and complete as soon as possible. Any questions as these are completed can be directed to Amanda, Libby, or Tom.
- Members must complete this annually prior to the grant review process per the newly adopted COI language in the MARTAB Bylaws.
- The form is a simple one-page listing of each member's affiliations and memberships that could cause potential conflicts of interest while the member executes his/her duties as a MARTAB member, whether during the grant review or throughout the year.
- Mike made a good point in bringing up that the form does not direct the members to identify each potential conflict according to the 3 levels that were defined in the COI language. For this year, self-determine which level each affiliation is for you. Amanda and Libby will review the forms as they are submitted. If they have a question about anything disclosed by a member, they will reach out to that member to best determine the most accurate disclosure in a particular case. We can revisit at the June Annual Meeting to determine if the form manages the disclosure process effectively; or if it needs adaptation.
- There appeared to be some confusion regarding the 3 levels of involvement. Please make sure to review the language in the COI section of the Bylaws prior to completing the Disclosure Form and prior to this year's grant review. Each level and the appropriate recusal actions to be taken, are clearly defined within that language. This language was determined after a lengthy debate, proposal, and comment period by the MARTAB members as the appropriate measures to enact to ensure transparency with regards to real or perceived conflicts of interest. Bylaws were re-distributed to members in case they could not find the earlier copy sent in October.

- Tim volunteered to put together a list of youth corps and how they play into the RTP process as a guide for use during the RTP grant review. This will be very helpful.
- With COVID-19 anticipated to get worse before better, we will again use a remote meeting framework for this year's review. To be determined: our use of Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Amanda and Libby will be sending out instructions closer to the February 1 application deadline to get everyone set up for a successful review process.
- Mike asked if there is any indication that we will receive fewer applications this year due to the pandemic. Amanda responded that she has been answering calls and emails from potential applicants and has no indication there will be fewer this year. Once February 1 comes, we will know the answer. Marianne noted that many municipalities are holding back on projects as they struggle with lower budgets due to the pandemic. So, there is a real likelihood we will have lower than usual application numbers this year.

Dick O'Brien Recognition of Service

- After adoption of the COI language in the Bylaws, Dick O'Brien determined it was in MARTAB's best interest that he step down from the board due to his role at Conservation Works.
- Amanda asked for suggestions on how to recognize Dick's years of service on the board. It was agreed that at a minimum, a thank you letter needs to be written and sent. Becky volunteered to draft the letter.
- Other ideas were to purchase a small gift certificate; waive his MassTrails Conference registration fee in perpetuity; invite him to our annual field trip in June and fete his time and efforts with a celebratory cake. As the June meeting approaches, we can revisit to ensure we do not miss the opportunity to appropriately recognize Dick's years of dedicated service to MARTAB.

Other Business

- Legislative Caucus Subcommittee Update

Dick O'Brien had taken the lead on this. With his departure this is in limbo. Additionally, with the ongoing pandemic legislators are likely not prioritizing these types of agendas and activities. Amanda thinks Galen Mook, Executive Director at Mass Bike, may have some insight. She will reach out to him as well as raise the topic among the Trails Team to see if anyone has additional information to share. We will revisit at our June meeting.

Tom also suggested that each of the MARTAB members reach out to their respective networks and inquire as to any information that can be shared. For now, MARTAB can endeavor to build local support among network connections and lay the groundwork to be ready to act when the time is more appropriate.

- Education Grants Process

We will be revising and adopting a new timeline to Education Grants. Amanda will tackle this once we are well into the grant round for this year. The idea thus far is to open the grant application process in May with a shorter review period. The goal would be to have these grants up and running for October 1, which aligns better with grantee's timelines and fiscal years.

Tim asked if a project involving interpretive signs would qualify. If the interpretive signs are part of on-the-ground trail construction, then the answer is "No." This is better suited as a typical RTP application.

The distinction comes with what the project's takeaway is. If it is knowledge, awareness, or education about trails then it qualifies for an Education Grant. If the takeaway is a more tangible, physical outcome (design documents, construction, maintenance, equipment purchase), then it falls within the definition of a regular RTP grant.

Tom asked if it is possible to put together an educational program to promote the Student Conservation Association through MassTrails? Amanda responded that it could be, if the program is framed as something along the lines of "Benefits of Engaging Youth Corps." It would need to be generic in its basic message so as not to promote one entity over another. Otherwise we would be creating a legal issue by not abiding by the state's requirement of an "open and competitive" grant award process.

Two additional ideas for this were discussed. The first is the idea to develop a one-sheet white paper that outlines the advantages, availability, and process of using youth groups in trails projects. The second is to pull together a few youth-oriented trails groups to host an educational event that advocates for the same as above. We can revisit this at our June meeting to expand on the ideas.

Larry asked if there is an opportunity to develop some education around snowmobile/motorized trails. Amanda responded that providing the goal is intended to educate the greater, general public to opportunities and not specifically targeted to snowmobile/motorized use enthusiasts, then yes this could be a potential Educational Grant project. She asked Larry to provide more details to vet this more properly and ensure it meets the Educational Grant requirements.

- MassTrails Conference

The decision has been made to not host an in-person, conference in 2021 due to the pandemic and uncertainties regarding large, indoor events in the coming year. We are going to use the time to catch our breath, finish the program upgrades, and look to the future of what is possible once we have a better understanding of what the COVID-19 landscape holds for us.

There is a possibility of hosting some conference-like sessions online in November, or a few months later. However, MassDOT hosted online their typically well-attended Moving Together conference in November. It was not as successful as when held in person. The effort to adopt a completely different platform may not have been worth the time it took.

We can discuss further at the June meeting. We will have a much better understanding of what may or may not be possible in the fall of 2021 at that time.

Upcoming Meeting Dates

Saturday, March 13, 2021 – 9am to 4pm (Annual Grant Review)

Tuesday, June 8, 2020 – 1 to 5pm (Annual Meeting and Field Trip)

Meeting Adjourned 2:00 pm