

No horses, no fences are solution for Belmont Village Rail Spur Trail

By THOMAS P. CALDWELL, LACONIA DAILY SUN

BELMONT — Eliminate the fences, don't allow horses, and erect two rugged posts 14 inches apart.

George Corliss proposed that simple solution as an alternative to the complex and expensive plan the Belmont Conservation Commission had come up with to address concerns about how people, horses, and cattle would interact on the Village Rail Spur Trail.

By also including signs warning hikers that they may encounter cattle on their trek, those afraid of cows would be forewarned, he said.

Members of the Conservation Commission agreed last week that such a solution would serve the public while affording protection for the Corliss farm.

The Conservation Commission will be managing the trail, which will link the Tioga Pavilion in downtown Belmont to South Road along an abandoned railroad bed, and eventually join the main trail that is being developed along the rail line between Franklin and Laconia.

Typically, the commission allows horses on town conservation properties, but Selectman Ruth Mooney said that equestrians would not be likely to trailer horses to the area for a two-mile trail ride.

To accommodate the horses and avoid conflicts with the cattle, the commission had previously proposed erecting a fence alongside the trail, but Sterling Blackey, representing the Corliss farm, had expressed concern that the proposed fence might not be strong enough.

Richard Ball, the town's land use technician, had updated the plan to double the number of posts or utilize a chain link fence.

Another concern was the need for the cattle to pass from one pasture to the other, on either side of the pathway. Commissioner Claude Patten said he had found a design for a bridge with an underpass for cattle. Ball determined that it would cost \$12,000 for the culvert only, and that it would require 1,000 yards of fill. The total cost was estimated at \$50,000, plus the cost of the fencing.

Even if they decided to keep horses off the trail, commissioners were concerned about the possibility of endangering the public without a fence. They questioned Corliss about the likelihood of a cow biting someone, and he said cows do not bite, but they are curious and might approach passers-by. Corliss was just as worried about damage to his property from four-wheelers and trail bikes, so he wanted to maintain the locked gates to prevent their entry. A 14-inch opening would allow people to pass through, he said.

Commissioners told him they wanted to develop the trail without harming his farming operation, and they were willing to try Corliss' solution for a year and review how it was working and possibly renegotiate the arrangement if there was a problem.

They agreed to have Corliss and Blackie on hand when they installed the posts. Corliss recommended 6-inch by 6-inch or 8-inch by 8-inch posts, buried 4 feet into the ground to make sure they wouldn't move.

Corliss also asked that they invite him back for any future discussions about the trail.

The trail extension became possible when a group of citizens recently erected a second wooden bridge over the Tioga River west of Great Brook Village. It lies along the railbed of the 4-mile Tilton and Belmont

branch of the Boston & Maine railroad, which operated between 1889 and 1929, serving the Gilmanton Mills hosiery business. Later known as the Belmont Hosiery Company, it operated at what today is known as the Belmont Mill. The rails, bridges, and trestles were removed in 1934.

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