
BRATT engineers address time concerns

By TIM CAMERATO | Jul 09, 2014

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BELMONT — Engineers working on the Winni Trail met with the Board of Selectmen on Monday to address its concerns with an archeological study needed to move forward.

At their June 16 meeting, selectmen expressed their disapproval with The Louis Berger Group of Manchester after hearing that part of the future trail needed to be studied for artifacts.

Belmont Land Use Technician Richard Ball said he's met with officials at the state Department of Transportation since the meeting, and they believed the process could move forward while the study was going on.

Ball said he was told that federal funds for the survey aren't plentiful at NHDOT and it could be until October before the town sees any money for it.

Chairman Ruth Mooney asked Ball what happens if artifacts are found on the site. He replied that other projects raised the trail rather than dig down.

“What the study will do is they'll go out and make some shovel tests of the area,” Berger Engineer Mike Pillsbury said. “If they find nothing, they'll say 'OK, this wasn't there.' If they find something ... they'll document what they found for future tests, they'll write the report, and then they'll ask if there's ways that we can negate that.”

Selectman Ronald Cormier asked why the board didn't know about the need for the study earlier.

“The easy answer to that is that the nature of the project has changed,” Engineer Timothy Higginson said. “The initial alignment of the project followed the rail, which is disturbed, which was way back in the beginning.”

He said the trail's new location in the woods behind the Belknap Mall is in undisturbed land with potential archeological activity.

Higginson said final plans have already been submitted to the town and state. They include final cost estimates and construction documents.

“We essentially have a final set of plans ready to be bid outside of the categorical exclusion process and the acquirement of the easements,” Higginson said.

He said a piece of the trail at Osborne's Agway also needs to be realigned and they're awaiting feedback.

Right now, the project is scheduled to put out bids in December and construction is slated to begin in the spring of 2015.

Mooney said she hasn't been a selectman as long as Cormier and Jon Pike, but she understands that they're frustrated with the project.

"I can't believe it's not done and I'm just ... get me a bulldozer," Mooney said.

Cormier said that he's frustrated with how the project has gone, and that's putting it mildly.

"This project has been an unmitigated disaster from day one. We are eight years into this project. We rebuilt half the town before we could build a walking trail," Cormier said. "It's ridiculous and Louis Berger Group was hired to do the engineering here and I'm not blaming it solely on your company, but some of the fault lies there."

He said more attention needs to be paid to the project and progress need to get pushed through.

"Eventually, this board, I think, is going to just pull the plug," Cormier said. "I don't want to see that happen and I don't want to have to go get another engineer because that's going to set us back another two years. But that's the point that I'm at."

He asked that they do their best to get the project where it needs to be.

"Our residents have been very generous with voting this project, but they're going to get to the point where they see nothing happening," Mooney said.

The board then asked that engineers send them updates on the project so they can stay informed.

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Tim Camerato
Reporter
603-581-1962
[Email Me](#)

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