

News Release

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FOR RELEASE: Immediate

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April 14, 2011

Albany County, Town of Bethlehem and Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy

Partner to Open Section of Rail Trail

Inter-municipal Agreement Would Open Trail to Public by Early Summer

Albany County, the Town of Bethlehem and the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy (MHLC) have developed an inter-municipal agreement to open a 1.85 mile section of the Albany County Rail Trail to the public for limited non-motorized use. The agreement is subject to approval by the Bethlehem Town Board and County Legislature.

“Since we completed the purchase last year, there have been limited funds available to develop the former rail corridor into a safe and accessible recreational trail,” said County Executive Mike Breslin. “We are excited to be able to progress the Rail Trail project with the help of the Town of Bethlehem and the MHLC as we know many are eager to start using the trail. This collaborative effort will allow residents to begin enjoying part of the trail by the summer.”

The abandoned rail corridor stretches nine miles, from the Port of Albany to the Village of Voorheesville. The 1.85 mile section begins at Fireman’s Park near New Scotland Road in Slingerlands and ends at the Veteran’s Park on Delaware Avenue in Delmar. The remainder of the trail will remain closed to the public since extensive bridge repair and other safety improvements are necessary on those sections.

Town of Bethlehem Supervisor Sam Messina said, “Bethlehem is very pleased to team up with Albany County and the MHLC to open up a beautiful section of trail between Delmar and Slingerlands. Our town is doing all that we can to be pedestrian friendly, and this creative approach to open up a part of the nine mile trail, at no cost to Bethlehem residents, fits in perfectly with our PaTHs4Bethlehem program.”

The County, Town and MHLC will be making minor improvements to initially open the 1.85 section of trail for pedestrian use only. Work will include vegetation clearing, drainage improvements and posting signs. MHLC will be implementing a fundraising campaign to support further upgrades to the section to allow access for mountain bikes. Work for this phase will include clearing brush and tree branches to widen the path and installation of barrier railing at a narrow section of the trail. Due to the surface of the rail bed, which consists of stone, gravel and organic material, only pedestrians and mountain bikes will be permitted.

Jill Knapp, executive director of the MHLC said, “MHLC has supported the County’s efforts to develop the rail trail since the beginning. We are elated that a portion of the trail will finally be opened for public use this year. We are pleased to be able to work collaboratively with Albany County and the Town of Bethlehem on this project that has so much public benefit.”

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Under the agreement, the Town and MHLC will be responsible for ongoing maintenance and management of the trail section. Any proposed improvements or upgrades will need to be approved by the Town and County.

Albany County Legislator Thomas J. Cotrofeld, Jr., who represents the 34th Legislative District and is an avid bicyclist, said, “The opening of this 1.85 mile section of the Rail Trail for use this summer opens the door to an invaluable recreational resource for our residents.” Cotrofeld also expressed hope that in the future the Rail Trail is able to be extended to the full nine-mile length which will further enhance the recreational and fitness benefit to all.

The agreement will be considered by the Bethlehem Town Board at its April 27th meeting and by the County Legislature at its May 9th meeting.

The County purchased the abandoned nine-mile stretch of the old Delaware & Hudson Railway for \$700,000 from Canadian Pacific Railway in January 2010. The acquisition was paid for with a \$350,000 grant from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) and matching funds from Scenic Hudson, a Poughkeepsie-based non-profit land conservation organization.

Canadian Pacific Railway abandoned the rail line in 2003. The County and Scenic Hudson immediately began negotiations with Canadian Pacific for the purchase of the property. The County also filed a request for Railbanking with the federal government’s Surface Transportation Board, which preserves the entire length of the corridor by converting it to trail use and prevents the property from being broken up and sold piecemeal.

The MHLC’s volunteer committee, “Friends of the Rail Trail” (FORT), the non-profit organization Parks & Trails New York and Scenic Hudson continue to play a valuable role in the public planning process for the rail trail. The County and its partners continue to actively seek grants and other funding opportunities to develop the total nine-mile trail for pedestrian and bicycle use.

The many benefits of rail trails include preservation of open space, community linkages, promotion of non-motorized transportation alternatives, opportunities for physical fitness and to enjoy the outdoors and increased property values for surrounding communities.

More information about the project is available at www.albanycounty.com/railtrail. To become a member of MHLC or to volunteer with the rail trail, visit www.MohawkHudson.org.

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