

Tupper Lakers mostly glad about rail-trail decision

As submitted to the Adirondack Daily Enterprise, February 12, 2016 By TOM SALITSKY - Staff Writer

TUPPER LAKE - This community lies at the junction of the rail-trail plan the Adirondack Park Agency approved Thursday, and the prevailing sentiment in these parts seemed to be summarized in a post on the Enterprise's Facebook page regarding the announcement: "About time," Tupper Laker Dave McMahon wrote.

"What fantastic news for Tupper Lake," Daniel Baldwin of Tupper Lake said on the Facebook page. "Now, we may see some money from the new access into this town and the train folks will still have access to the rails!"

The state's plan calls for splitting the Remsen-Lake Placid Travel Corridor into two segments intersecting at Tupper Lake. Segment 1 would upgrade the tracks from Big Moose to Tupper Lake for train use while segment 2 would build a recreational trail from Tupper Lake to Lake Placid.

On Feb. 4, Franklin County Legislators voted unanimously to support a rails-with-trails option for the corridor that would keep the rail line and build a trail beside it, something the departments of Environmental Conservation and Transportation had ruled out as not feasible. In response to the resolution, over 80 Tupper Lake businesses signed an open letter published in this week's Tupper Lake Free Press protesting the county's position and endorsing the DEC and DOT plan.

After the APA approved the state's plan, Mayor Paul Maroun, who is also a Franklin County legislator, said he thinks it will work, even though he had opposed it.

"It's going to be good for Tupper Lake, and I think it'll bring tourists in from both sides," Maroun said. "Now we've got to make sure ... that they're actually going to give the railroad ... the millions to redo the tracks to make them really up to date.

"Hopefully, along with doing that, they're going to give the Adirondack (Scenic) Railway ... a longer than 30-day lease agreement."

Railway officials have said the 30-day lease was a major stumbling block in their search for investors.

"I know there are a lot of people upset with some of the positions we take on this railroad, but there are always two sides to an issue," Maroun said. "I'm still of the belief that there are certain environmentalists that eventually don't want anything on that trail. If you take the rails up - and I'm not a judge - but I think there is a strong legal argument that you wouldn't be able to do any motorized vehicles. At least if you have tracks, you'll be able to run that in the winter.

"I think it's a compromise. Not everybody's happy, but that's what a compromise is on this type of thing. Now they've got to implement it."

ADK Bloody Mary Tonic owner Christine Marquis, who also manages the Trail's End Tavern, said she signed the letter because she thinks the trail will drive increased snowmobile traffic to the area.

"The snowmobiles can't get to us at Trail's End ... because of the rails," she said. "I think there is much more business that can come in if they took off those rails."

P2's Irish Pub also signed the letter. Its manager, Rick Donah, was recently a village trustee who clashed with Maroun on this issue at board meetings.

"I think it is a wonderful opportunity for Tupper Lake to be the hub of both pedestrian and train transportation for the Tri-Lakes area," Donah said. "I think it serves our business community well, and it gives us an opportunity to rejuvenate the Junction (the neighborhood near the train station)."

Donah said the trail will give people from Fish Creek and Rollins pond a way to ride their bikes into Tupper Lake, and he said the plan will increase snowmobile traffic as well.

"We have all the assets here in Tupper Lake to be a destination," he said. "We just need some help in developing the economics."

Ron LaScala, the owner of ADK Appliance Repair and a village trustee who defeated Donah in the last election, also signed the letter. He said he attended the APA's meeting Thursday.

"I was excited to see it happen," he said. "I think it's a good compromise. You get a little rail, you get a little trail. We'll see what works."

Town Supervisor Patti Littlefield was thrilled with the APA's vote and critical of the Board of Legislators' position.

"The town of Tupper Lake has filed two formal resolutions supporting the removal of the tracks," she said. "We all have agreed many times over, openly, that this ... is totally a win-win for Tupper Lake.

"I hope the Franklin County Board of Legislators re-looks at their resolution. ... The majority of Tupper Lake is in favor of this, and they are as thrilled as (the members of the town board) are. ... Now that it was passed through the APA, I'm going to talk to the chairman of the county Board of Legislators and ask them if they would consider changing their resolution they passed. I don't know if they will or not, but I hope they do."