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September 22, 2006

CERTIFICATE OF THE SECRETARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL NOTIFICATION FORM

PROJECT NAME: Westfield-Southwick Recreational Trail Project
PROJECT MUNICIPALITY: Westfield and Southwick
PROJECT WATERSHED: Westfield
EOEA NUMBER: 13859
PROJECT PROPONENT: Massachusetts Highway Department
DATE NOTICED IN MONITOR: August 8, 2006

Pursuant to the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (M.G.L. c. 30, ss. 61-62H) and Section 11.11 of the MEPA Regulations (301 CMR 11.00), I have reviewed this project and hereby determine that it does not require further MEPA review. In a separate Decision also issued today, I have proposed to grant a Waiver from the requirement to prepare a Mandatory Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the project. This Certificate sets forth the issues that must be addressed by the proponent during permitting and discusses recommendations that were submitted on the project during the MEPA comment period.

Project Description

As outlined in the Environmental Notification Form (ENF), the City of Westfield and the Town of Southwick, in conjunction with the Massachusetts Highway Department (MassHighway), are proposing to construct a recreational trail along the former Penn Central and Pioneer Valley Railroads from the Westfield River in Westfield south to the Connecticut border, a distance of approximately 9.3 miles. The southern terminus of the trail will provide a direct connection to the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail in Suffield, Connecticut. The northern terminus of the trail will provide a direct connection to downtown Westfield through Women's Christian Temperance Park.

For construction purposes, the project has been divided into five sections. The Southwick portion of the project has two sections: Section I extends from the Southwick, MA/Suffield, CT border north to Point Grove Road and Section II extends from Point Grove Road north to the Southwick/Westfield town line. The Westfield portion of the project (known as the Columbia Greenway) has three sections: Section II extends from the Southfield/Westfield town line north to the Columbia Manufacturing Company; Section I extends from the Columbia Manufacturing Company north to the Westfield River Bridge; and Section III is the rehabilitation of the Westfield River Bridge, including its conversion to a recreational trail.

The proposed work for all sections generally involves the removal of the remaining railroad ties, construction of a 10- to 12.5-foot paved path with 2- to 3-foot graded shoulders; construction of several access paths to the trail from adjacent roadways and other areas; construction of several small parking areas; replacement or rehabilitation of numerous bridges; repair or replacement of drainage structures; installation of fences or guardrail in steeply sloped areas; installation of traffic signals and crosswalks; landscaping; informational signs; and pavement markings. Several rest areas will be constructed along the trail having bicycle racks, benches, picnic tables and trash receptacles.

Jurisdiction

The project is subject to the preparation of a mandatory EIR pursuant to Section 11.03(1)(a)(2) of the MEPA regulations because it will result in the creation of more than ten acres of new impervious surface. The project also meets the ENF review threshold at 301 CMR 11.03(3)(b)(1)(f) because it will result in the alteration of greater than ½ an acre of “any other wetlands”, in this case Riverfront Area. The project will require a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Construction General Permit from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); a Programmatic General Permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) pursuant to Section 404 of the Clean Water Act; review from the MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP); review from the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC); and Order of Conditions from the Westfield and Southwick Conservation Commissions. Because the proponent is a state agency, MEPA jurisdiction is broad and extends to all aspects of the project that may cause significant damage to the environment.

Land Alteration/Drainage

The project will result in the creation of 12.6 acres of new impervious surface which will be spread out over an area of 9.3 linear miles. According to the ENF, the Westfield-Southwick Trail has been designed to meet MassDEP’s Stormwater Management Policy, using appropriate Best Management Practices (BMPs) to treat runoff. MassHighway states that the project will improve the management of stormwater along the rail corridor. Throughout the entire project area the rails, ties and ballast have been removed to sub-base depths creating an unstable condition prone to washing out during heavy rainstorms. The construction of the recreational trail will reduce siltation and sedimentation into adjacent wetlands by eliminating the current “sluiceway” and “break-out” conditions created by the previously excavated railway bed. Under the proposed plan, stormwater that falls onto the paved path will be distributed via sheet drainage

to either side of the pathway and allowed to slowly percolate into the stone shoulder and vegetated grass shoulders and adjacent woodlands. In addition, the trail will only be utilized by non-motorized recreational vehicles and therefore the potential to introduce pollutants into the environment is negligible.

Wetlands

The project has been designed to minimize impacts to wetland resource areas. Due to the proximity of wetlands along the Southwick section of the project, the trail in Southwick has been designed as a 10-foot cross section in order to minimize impacts to the buffer zone and avoid wetland impacts. The proponent has received a Negative Determination of Applicability from the Southwick Conservation Commission for Southwick Phase II and has received an Order of Conditions for work in the Riverfront Area along Southwick Phase I.

In Westfield, the proponent anticipates that wetland impacts will be minor in nature and consist of less than 100 linear feet of Bank, less than 500 sf of Land Under Water, less than 500 sf of Bordering Vegetated Wetland, and approximately 23,000 sf of Riverfront Area. The proponent should note comments from MassDEP that the provisions for bikepaths in the wetlands regulations at 310 CMR 10.53(6) only apply to the riverfront area. The proponent should consult with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as to whether permits are required for work in the Westfield River and Little River, portions of which are considered to be Essential Fish Habitat (EFH). The proponent should also contact MassDEP's Waterways program to determine whether a Chapter 91 application is required for the project.

Rare Species

The project site is located within Priority Habitat (PH 940 & PH 1267) and Estimated Habitat (WH 7334 & 329) as indicated in the 11th Edition of the MA Natural Heritage Atlas. The Creeper (*Strophitus undulates*) and the Triangle Floater (*Alasmidonta undulate*) are known to occur in the Westfield River (PH 940 & WH 7334) located at the northern portion of the project. As the proposed project will occur within mapped Priority Habitat, the proponent is required to file pursuant to the MESA. Once NHESP receives a complete MESA filing, it will determine whether or not the proposed project will result in the "take" of state-listed rare species in the Westfield portion of the project. If the project is determined to result in a "take," then it may be possible to redesign the project to avoid a "take." If such revisions are not possible, the applicant should note that projects resulting in the "take" may only be permitted if they meet the performance standards for a "Conservation and Management Permit" under MESA (321 CMR 10.04(3)(b)).

The American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) and Slender Cottongrass (*Eriophorum gracile*) are known to occur in Priority Habitat 1267 and Estimated Habitat 329, which is located in the vicinity of the wetland south of Congammond Road/Route 168 and north of the Connecticut state border located at the southern portion of the project. NHESP's primary concern regarding the proposed project in the Southwick portion is the potential for disruption of the American Bittern's breeding, nesting, and feeding activities during the construction. The NHESP has determined that a prohibited "take" may be avoided by conditioning the project with a timing

restriction.

Historic Resources

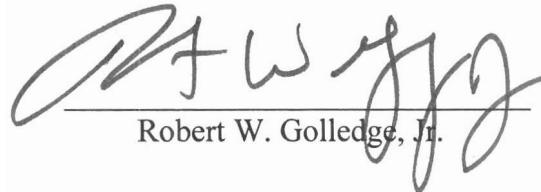
There are no historic properties in the Southwick portion of the project that will be affected by the project. The portion of the project in Westfield will involve the rehabilitation of two railroad bridges that are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The northern end of the project is also adjacent to the Depot Square, which is included in MHC's Inventory of Historic and Archaeological Assets of the Commonwealth. MHC has indicated in its comments on the ENF that the project will have "no adverse effect" (36 CFR 800.5(b) and 950 CMR 71.07(2)(b)(2)) on the above listed historical resources.

Conclusion

Based on a review of the information provided by the proponent and after consultation with the relevant public agencies, I find that the potential impacts of this project do not warrant further MEPA review. Outstanding issues may be addressed during the permitting process.

September 22, 2006

Date



Robert W. Golledge, Jr.

Comments received:

8/14/2006	Town of Southwick Historical Commission
8/24/2006	Michael R. Knapik, State Senator, 2 nd Hampden and Hampshire District, Massachusetts
8/28/2006	City of Westfield, Engineering Department
8/29/2006	John W. Olver, Member of Congress, 1 st District, Massachusetts
8/29/2006	Town of Southwick, Board of Selectmen
8/31/2006	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
9/4/2006	Westfield Columbia Greenway Rail Trail Advisory Committee
9/5/2006	Massachusetts Historical Commission
9/12/2006	Department of Environmental Protection, Western Regional Office
9/12/2006	Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program
9/12/2006	Department of Conservation and Recreation

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