Recreational and Agricultural Use Citizens Committee (RACC)

for *former DFY and BOCES Properties*

Highlights of Final Report

Town Board, April 27, 2016

Committee's Values

- Protect the character of our rural community.
- Identify uses that are assets that fit into a residential neighborhood.
- Safeguard and restore natural habitats for birds and wildlife.
- Increase access to outdoor recreational activities.
- Identify low cost/high impact recreation uses for people of all ages.
- Find uses to increase access to the outdoors, nature, health, fitness.
- Promote interest in rural history and conservation.
- Promote gardening and explore for recreation-agriculture uses.
- Make suggestions that benefit residents of all ages, and not be a cost for taxpayers.

Advisory Committee

Marianne Rizzo

Ted Strang, Board, NYS Transportation Museum

Philip T. Daggar, adjacent neighbor and property enthusiast for 35+ years

Jim Smith, neighbor

Cecil Palmer

Kathryn Hankins

Acknowledgements

Cathleen Frank, Town Supervisor

Kathryn Steiner, Town Board Liaison 2012-2015

Gerald Kusse, Town Board Liaison 2016

Pat Stephens, Recreation Director

Mark David, Highway Department Supervisor and many Highway Department staff

David Sluberski, West Rush Productions, for his aerial photos

Please note: Photos were requested by Committee members, and permission was given solely for the use in this presentation. They are not to be edited, extracted or copied for any other use unless written permission is granted by West Rush Productions-WRP.

Resolution #130-2012 August 22, 2012

Original Goal: " to provide suggestions to the Board for the uses of the BOCES property located at 6565 East River Road and the Division of Youth property located at 375 Rush Scottville Road"

Scope of the committee's work increased. Committee members worked together with Town Supervisors, liaisons, and Town Board.

Committee members engaged in a wide range of activities to provide public access to town residents, research potential uses, and protect the buildings from further damage.

Results of authorized expansion of committee activities:

- **Walking trails** developed. Tours offered.
- **A detailed review of BOCES buildings** was conducted and a plan presented to stop the deterioration of roofs and building structures.
- **Risk Management** - Committee members actively investigated and presented concerns and solutions about the land and buildings on the former BOCES property; the town board was alerted to serious health, safety, security concerns. (examples – hunting, unauthorized youth after hours, barb wire)
- The committee worked diligently to increase ways to **ensure safe access** to the property; and on an ongoing basis, send suggestions on viable passive recreation activities that could be offered without risk.

Desired outcomes :

- Land restored to more natural state that helps to maintain and promote the habitats for birds and wildlife.
- Forest left in its natural habitat for wildlife, with only needed efforts to ensure public safety, fire prevention.
- Improvements made to increase safe public access (e.g. remove landfill materials; concrete and asphalt).
- Complete “Do No Harm” repairs to buildings to provide time for utilization and cost-analysis.

Two different parcels: total 315 acres

History: Both parcels part of School of Industry (165 years old).

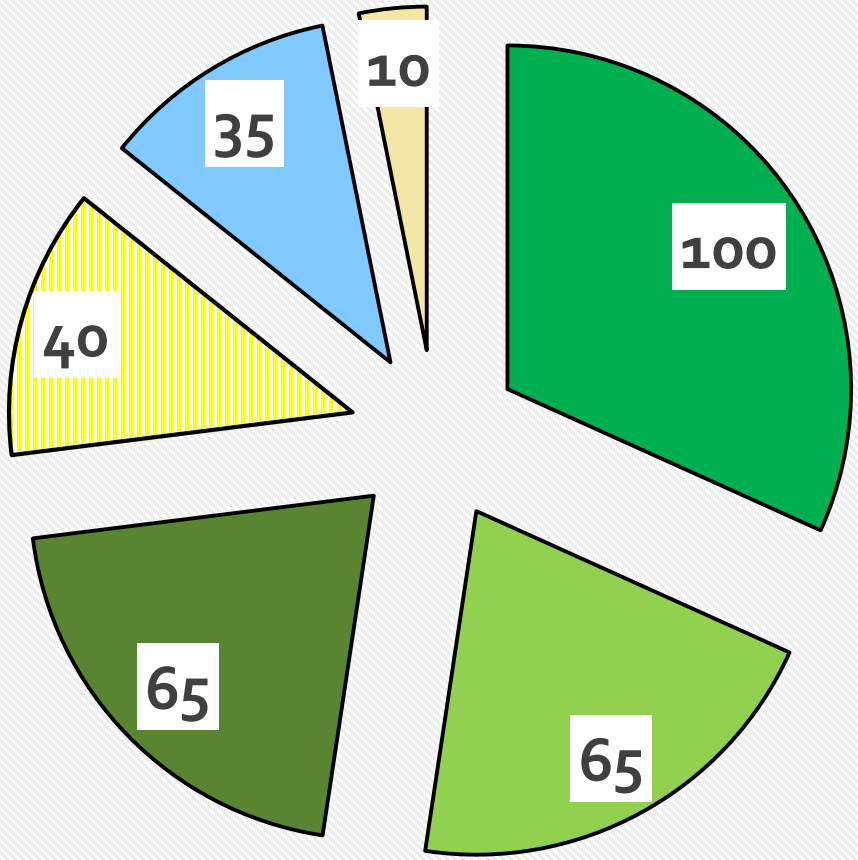
Parcel #1: 100.5 acres

Parcel #2: 215.73 acres

Natural and Developed Landscape Areas

Description and Acres*

Fields	100
Low Grass and Hills	65
Forests, River edge	65
Wetlands,Trails	40
Buildings/Museum	35
Easements/Roads	10



*** Estimates**

Description of **Parcel #1 100.5 Acres**

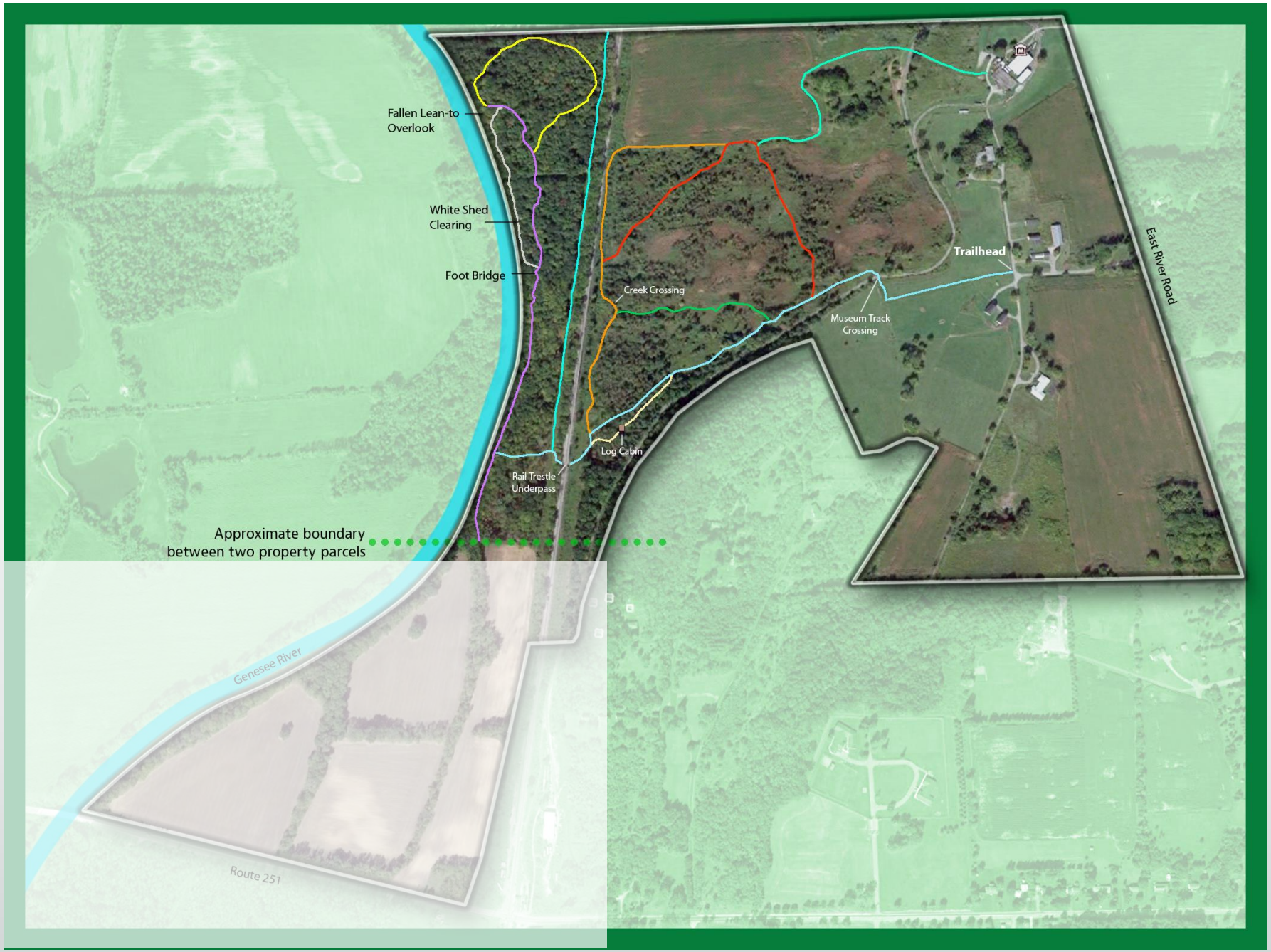
- **Transferred 2010** from NYS Office of General Services.
- **Restricted uses:** "Park and Recreation". Contains "reverter clause"
- Located between Genesee River and Railroad Museum on Route 251, Rush-Scottsville Road. Estimate 1600-2000 feet on Genesee River. (a section of the more than 1 mile on Genesee River of total property)
- **Located in Floodplain.** Stream runs through the property.
- **Lots separated by tree border/buffers for drainage and to slow down sediment and non-point pollution of the river.**
- **Approximately 54 acres in 4 fields** designed using best management practices to reduce run-off into the Genesee River. Same lot configuration since at least 1990 (based on maps from Monroe County Soil and Water)

Map of Parcel 1: 100.5 acres

Parcel #2 215.73 Acres

- **Former Rush Campus of Board of Cooperative Educational Services** (BOCES) No. 1. Located on River Road.
- **BOCES purchased from NYS Office of General Services in 1995.** Transferred to Town of Rush in 2011.
- **Restricted use, Acquisition Agreement:** "Park and recreation and ancillary uses" An ancillary use support primary uses of land. Land cannot be sold or leased for any other purposes. Contains a "Reverter Clause"
- **Home to NYS Transportation Museum**
- **9 Buildings,** former classroom and administration buildings.
- **Archeological sensitive areas** found during SEQRA review.
- **Environmental sensitive areas** including a drumlin; also includes wetlands; natural grass, and forest areas.

Map of Parcel 2: 215.73 acres



Suggestions are based on assumptions including:

- **Implement a Prevention, Risk and Pest Management Plan** that preserves natural habitats, and uses high standards for public safety: e.g. identify invasive species; dead or fallen trees; erosion; security issues; and needed building repairs. (e.g. trails, signs,)
- **Use existing models and best-practices to restore and safeguard land features, and watershed.** Eliminate non-point pollution of the Genesee River. Use non-toxic, natural solutions designed to preserve natural habitats. **(No pesticides, commercial crop farming, dumping.)**
- **Private non-profit foundation** raises supplemental funds to support restoration and special projects**.** ***(NYS towns cannot engage in fundraising)***
- **Volunteers** assist in beautification and maintenance activities.

Designate property as a park.

- Protects the land for future generations
- Supports the goals and restrictions imposed by the state on the land.
- Establishes a commitment. Prompts development of a master plan that engages many stakeholders.
- Increases opportunities for regional promotions, and partnerships with other Genesee River parks from Pennsylvania to Lake Ontario.
- Increases opportunities for grants and public support at a regional, state, and federal level from a wide range of agencies.
- Ensures future is not impacted by different town board administrations.
- Strengthens partnership with the Town Highway Department.
- Promotes greater stability of the residential neighborhood.

Establish a Natural Habitat Preserve.

Land Areas impacted: Forests, Wetlands, River bed fields, Riverfront, Grasslands

A haven for birds and wildlife.

A place where visitors can view a natural setting that has not been damaged by people, and where animals live and thrive.

"Although mature trees which generally dominate undisturbed forests don't grow as fast as young trees, they too can take advantage of the added light from natural clearings. Depending on the species, even mature trees can put on surprising growth spurts under favorable conditions." NYS DEC

Preserve and restore Natural Forest areas.

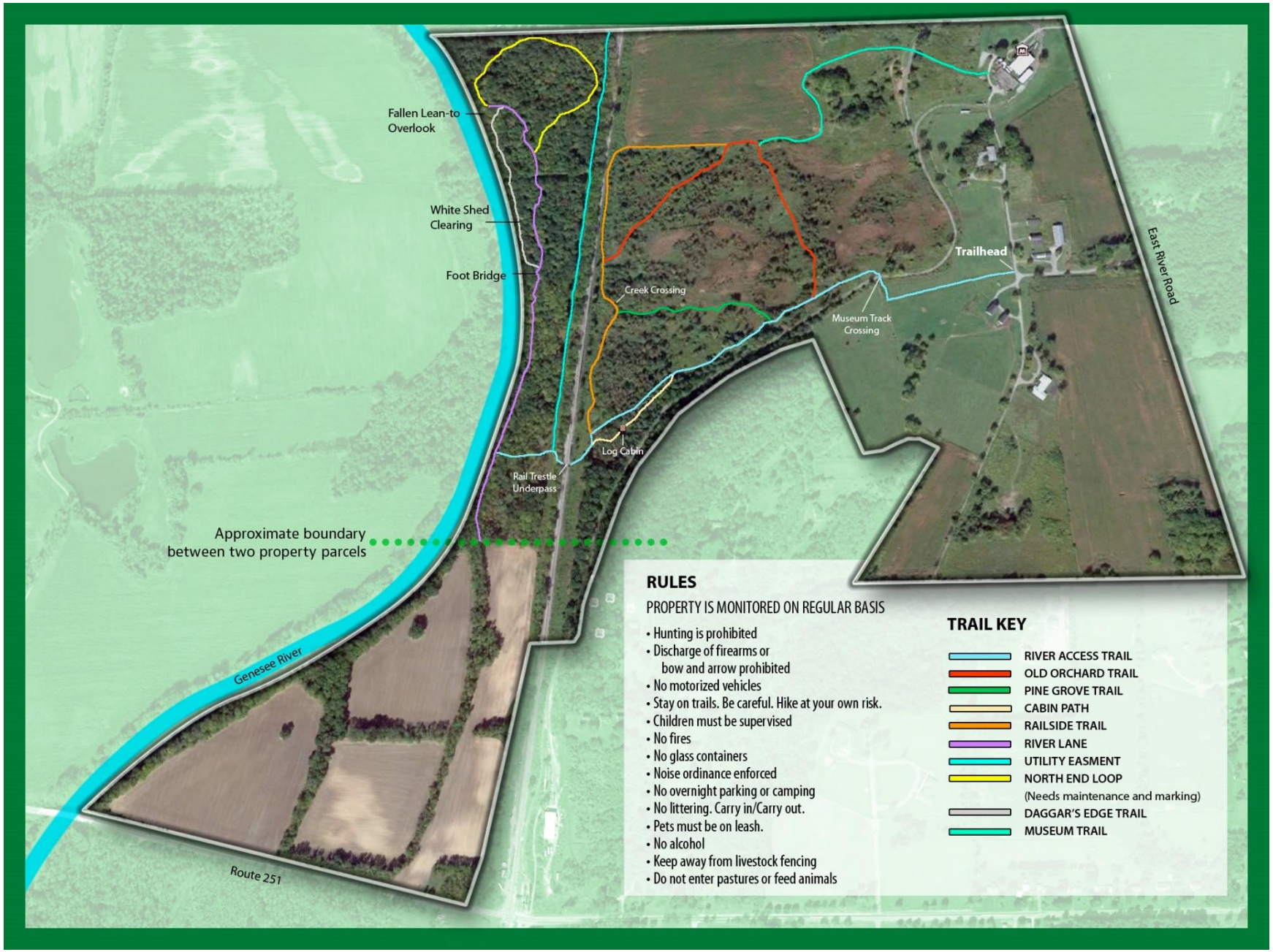
- **Remove only specific trees or fallen trees** that pose a risk to the railroad tracks, the trail and visitors. Maintain public safety and fire prevention. Keep forests as natural as possible to protect habitats of birds and wildlife.
- **The NYS Forestry Department 's** management plan was not designed to support a nature reserve. A different model is available from the NYS DEC to establish a natural forest preserve.
- **A team (e.g. citizen volunteers)** can be trained to be knowledgeable and committed to maintaining a nature preserve; and ensure commercial interests and money-making goals do not prevail.
- **There should be minimal removal of trees and limited pruning**. A do no harm policy should be in place, and a set of very conservative criteria developed and specific written reasons cited, with a sign off by the town board before any trees are removed.

Protect former DFY land (parcel by river) including:

- **Create a riverfront natural landscape design. Include nature trails to introduce residents to land.**
- **Implement best practices** for riverbed restoration *(Dept. of Environmental Conservation, Environmental Protection Agency and Mon. Co. Soil and Water)*
- **Maintain wetlands on land.** Allow natural ponding to reduce non-point source pollution to the Genesee River. Restore fields with grass and clovers.
- **Maintain the four fields and tree borders in place to protect** Genesee River.
- **Expand river border buffer to at least 100 feet**. Leave current trees and growth. Plant new hardwoods trees to expand border. *(Stroud Center)*
- **Reduce run-off and non-point source pollution. End use of pesticides, herbicides and insecticides**.

Our own beautiful year-round established trail system

Hiking level: Easy



Town of Rush
Old
Orchard
Trail

Town of Rush
RULES
• Property monitored regularly
• Hunting is strictly forbidden
• Discharge of firearms or bow and arrow prohibited
• No motorized vehicles
• Stay on trails
• Children must be supervised
• No fires
• No glass containers
• Noise ordinance enforced
• No overnight parking or camping
• No littering Carry in/Carry out
• Pets must be on leash
• No alcohol

Town of Rush
River
Access
Trail
Pine
Grove
Trail

Town of Rush
River Lane

Usability Improvements for trail system:

A. Expand Way-Finding System:

- **Add Trailhead Kiosk(s),** Add rustic-style kiosk information centers at main trail head and other entry points
    - Roofed structure (see photos of sample structures)
    - Bulletin board
    - Sign in
    - Rules
    - Maps
    - Event listings
    - Built in benches
    - Special condition warnings: i.e. insects, wet areas.

Trailhead Information Centers

Position at main trailhead and other entry points

Usability Improvements for trail system:

B. Make scenic area "destinations" along trail system

- **Destination 1: "White Cabin Overlook",** A scenic view of the river among large trees.

  - Clean up remaining debris and overgrowth.
  - Add simple picnic shelter with 1-2 tables (see photo samples on following slide)

- **Destination 2: "Fallen Lean-to Overlook",** An elevated view of the two river bends (formerly a campsite with a lean-to shelter)

  - Clean up debris from dismantled lean-to cabin.
  - Clean up overgrowth.
  - Add simple picnic shelter with 1-2 tables (see photo samples on following slide)

(continued)

Usability Improvements for trail system:

C. Make scenic area "destinations" along trail system

- **Destination 3: "Old Orchard Trail Clearing",** An open, grassy clearing at the south end of Old Orchard Trail

  - Add simple picnic shelter with 1-2 tables
  (see photo samples on following slide)

D. Repair/rebuild bridges

- **"Creek Crossing Bridge":** Rail road tie footbridge that has washed out.
- **"Foot Bridge":** Originally built to support trucks, tractors, etc. This bridge is in need of structural repair. If repaired to its original structural strength, it would allow for access by maintenance vehicles as well as foot traffic.

Simple picnic shelters

(forgo concrete pad due to construction accessibility)

Usability Improvements for trail system:

D. Vehicle barrier gates at trail entrances (example below)

E. Complete trail clearing of "Railside Trail" – north west corner

F. Trail clearing and marking in wooded area west of commercial railroad.

Enhance trails and paths to include fields, wetlands.

- **Trail Head to connect with Lehigh Valley and Genesee Valley Trail.**
- **Create look-outs, and look-up spots on the trail.**
- **Protect and preserve land**: wildlife, bird sanctuary, prohibit hunting, snowmobiles, ATVs, unauthorized uses.
- **Model evidence-based practices to protect the Genesee River:** Adhere to strict environmental, best management practices; protect soil; buffers to reduce loss of phosphates, non-point pollution, and sediment run-off to river.
- **Maintain and enhance trails** for hiking and horseback riding. .
- **Restore grassland and wetland areas** (remove dumping areas
- **Increase access to scouts, volunteer clean-up days,** tours, and outreach activities and events.
- **Increase strategies for enforcement** of prohibited activities.
- **Reject proposals that do not support park and recreation activities**, and could result in loss of natural setting. Commercial farming and pesticides are not compatible with recreation activities. Especially for young children and seniors.

NYS Transportation Museum – Cornerstone to creating a lasting legacy.

Strengthen Partnership with NY Transportation Museum and Railroad Museum

- Develop a long term agreement to support the museum.(located on site for more than 40 years)
- Develop an agreement to use their parking lot, water, bathroom facilities for special events.
- public-private agreement to strengthen and increase public use and promotion of both properties.
- Coordinate special events to introduce the museum and the walking trails.
- Recruit community volunteers to support both activities.
- Coordinate and support grants for building improvements.

Suggestions of Passive Recreation Activities include:

- Year-around hikes and guided tours.
- Identify great spots for photographers, bird watchers, wildlife, great trees.
- Invite to high school and college faculty/students to study wetland habitats, watersheds, environment, ecology, landscape design, and sustainability.
- Practice for Cross Country Race Teams.
- Flying kites, picnicking, picking-drying wildflowers.
- Snowshoe, Cross-country skiing,
- Biking Club Place to meet.

Suggestions for Active Recreation Activities include:

- **Senior activity center** run by senior volunteers.
- **Scouts and 4H activity** and meeting site.
- **Fall and Spring Festivals**, and other community-wide events.
- **Educational/recreational programs** to introduce and promote health and wellness, benefits of nature, exercise, fruits and vegetables, and stress-management.
- **Youth and business leadership and team development** (rope course).
- **Outdoor arts and crafts.**
- **Music events.**

Suggestions for Agriculture-Recreation Uses include:

- **Haven for Bees -** native wild flowers --
- **Maple Syrup Tapping** Recreation and History Program (40 trees)
- **Agritourism Activities** such as the Fall Festival
- **Memorial Tree Park** (oaks, maples)
- **Community Sustainable Agriculture** (CSA). 5- 10 acre can serve 250 full share CSA members. While many Rush residents are active gardeners, others, especially seniors, can no longer engage in this activity. A partnership with Food Link could be a successful partner for the region.
- **Specialty Crops** in partnership with area farmers;
- **Native Perennial Gardens**; Historical crop gardens (models available)
- **Natural Landscape Gardens**

More suggestions: Agriculture-Recreation

- **Fruit trees and berry bushes**, and other perennials (e.g. asparagus)
- **Herb garden** – nature classes on drying, using herbs, teas, benefits of herbs
- **Birds, bees, plants** – Nature Photography (i.e. Mendon is famous for a field of sunflowers planted at Route 64 and Stone Rd. – hundreds visit each fall)
- **Outdoor Courses on Permaculture** -- agriculture and social design principles centered around utilizing patterns and features of natural ecosystems.
- **Natural Landscape Architecture**: classes to learn more about how to design healthy habitats for wildlife, watersheds, soil health, and river walkways.
- **Farm Sanctuary** to rescue abused, abandoned, or injured farm animals and horses. (Ithaca model)
- **Agritourism activities:** Farmers' Market, Children and family programs.
- **Area High School and College Connections:** Outdoor courses in sustainability, environment, health and wellness, nature….

Plant trees to border, buffer, and beautify fields.

Develop walking paths.
Plant clover, grass, wildflowers to heal the soil.

Suggestion for uses for former BOCES buildings

- All uses should be compatible with public park and recreation uses.
- Children and youth recreation programs and services require protection and separation from commercial and non-authorized activities where individuals who have not passed police checks may be participating.
- Buildings may require extensive costs to renovate depending on the use, and/or expensive to maintain.
- Each building has many potential uses that have been identified.
- Each use could be evaluated based on a framework that includes taxpayer costs, staff impact, impact on the neighborhood, resident support, needs assessment, utilization, and duplication.

Many possible non-profit, recreation uses for buildings :

1. ***"World of Work Cottage"*** – kitchen, activity rooms – senior center
2. ***Livestock Barn*** (currently being used for Cattle): needs repairs – could be part of a sanctuary for abandoned and hurt animals
3. ***Mechanics Shop:*** currently used for training by Rush Fire Department
4. ***Tractor Shed:*** storage for BOCES Landscaping Program
5. ***Greenhouse/Carpenters Shop*** – new plants
6. ***Arena*** – special recreational events
7. ***Horse Stable*** (capacity 10-12 horses) – therapeutic riding
8. ***Blacksmith Shop***: potential historical recreation activities.
9. ***"Administration Offices"*** North Building – activity center
10. ***Log Cabin Retreat*** (use for Scouts, 4H, Youth Leadership, Hikers

Use available funds to fix roofs – **“Do No Harm”**

Alternatives to commercial farm lease income include:

(Many suggestions would require partnerships with a private, community-based non-profit foundation, and businesses)

- **"Family Tree"** – Memory walks - mixing genealogy, history and nature
- **Memorial and Honor Tree Walkway Program** - Trees, benches, stones
- **Private Donations, sponsors, and Grants**
- **Business and fraternal organizations** donations and sponsors for special events.
- **Partnerships with non-profits** that promote health and wellness and community awareness (e.g. Alzheimer's, Diabetes, Hypertension, Cancer, Heart, Kidney Diseases, Autism)
- **Unique fundraising events** that mix the unique features of the land, recreation, outdoors, and fun such as geocaching, scavenger hunts, garden parties, and other events for new projects.
- **Memorable Signature Annual Events:** History Days, Old Car Fairs, Flea Markets and other single day events supported by neighbors that do not jeopardize the land areas, or disrupt or alter the character of the neighborhood, but can bring in significant funds with sponsors for maintenance operations.

Suggestions to transition to Action Plans:

- **Resolve legal issues** for property transfers and funds received from leases.
- **Public Trust Doctrine to protect wetlands and Genesee River.**
- **Recruit new Citizens' Committee authorized to provide ongoing guidance, expertise, and active involvement in planning and implementing a wide range of activities that support development in accordance with an approved master plan endorsed by citizens.** *This is important regardless of whether the Town Board decides to eventually support and work together with a non-profit, non-partisan community-based private Foundation* for management of park activities.
- **Develop Master Plan to maintain natural habitats. Property is divided into distinct sections** with unique land features, wildlife habitats, flora, Base beautification and restoration plans on successful models.
- **Ensure best-management practices. Adhere** to well-established standards and guidelines for riverbed stabilization, and forests.

Summary:

The suggestions reinforce goals including:

- **The land has unique features,** and a rich history as an educational and agricultural setting for youth – a legacy well worth protecting and safeguarding for generations to come.
- **There are already enough "manicured" parks in this region.** Creating a natural habitat reserve that includes forest, wetlands, pasture, grass fields and riverbank would be unique and an asset to the community and region. There are models for the town board to achieve this goal.
- **One mile of Genesee River front puts us "on the map",** and offers our community an opportunity to partner with other communities bordering the Genesee River from Pennsylvania to Lake Ontario.
- **Research** regional, state, and national grants and partnerships.

Next Steps:

5/11/16 – Written Report Submitted

5/25/16 – Committee follow-up and response to questions.