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LD 29

I am writing to express support for LD29. As a staff member of the Kennebec Estuary Land Trust (KELT), I've been collaborating with the four communities along the route of the Merrymeeting Trail since 2012.

In October 2024, we partnered with the local towns to hold community conversations about the trail, inviting community members to meetings in each of the four towns along the trail route. These listening sessions provided a space to share thoughts about how the trail can be designed to best serve the region and be well used and loved by residents. The interest and turnout was impressive! There were 60 attendees at the Bowdoinham meeting, 34 attendees at the Richmond meeting, 30 attendees at the Gardiner meeting, and 58 attendees at the Topsham meeting - for a total of 182 people taking the time to come out in person to an hour and a half evening meeting and imagine how Merrymeeting Trail could be designed to benefit the region. The meetings gathered feedback about:

- 1) Trail Users: How would people like to use the trail and which groups of users are most in need of the trail as a resource because the region doesn't have many other safe and available options?
- 2) Community Connections: What resources within each of the towns should the trail try to connect with – like restaurants, businesses, schools, neighborhoods, playgrounds, history, and art?
- 3) Opportunities and Needs for Access to the Trail: Where is it easy or hard to get to the trail?
- 4) Trail Surface: Would stone dust or pavement best support trail users?

It was wonderful to see the interest and excitement for what the trail could become at each of these four meetings.

When I first started collaborating with communities around Merrymeeting Trail in 2012, one of the town staff members had kids in elementary school that she hoped would be able to enjoy the trail. These children have now grown and moved away without ever being able to take advantage of the train tracks in their community, and for me, they're a clear reminder that no action along the route has deprived a generation of Maine children of what could be an amazing resource. The last time the train tracks were regularly used was the 1980s, so it is really 2 or 3 generations that have had no use of a train or trail in the Lower Road. The studies completed during the Lower Road RUAC were a thorough assessment of if and how trains and trails could feasibility function on the Lower Road rail corridor, and the recommendations of the RUAC that LD29 would implement are for the best option that has a chance to happen and transform the unused train corridor into an amazing resource for the region before another generation misses out.