

## WFIM Virtual Town Hall – Summary Notes

October 18, 2022, 7pm via Zoom

### Introductions

Attendees: Bethan Maher (Executive Director), Brian Wise (Roadmaster), Daniel Heath, Nathaniel Nagel, Nate Shedd, Scott Gordon, Brian Bundridge, Randall Marquis, Tim Daubert, Ryan Handle, Steven Kind

### AHR / Transition Back to WFIM

Bethan came on board in 2017 as General Manager, about a year after AHR bought MRSR. AHR introduced successful events to the railroad, made significant investments in bridges and track, etc. Originally had big plans for expansion to Eatonville but lost funding in 2017, partly due to 416 fire along Durango & Silverton Railroad that summer and temporarily shut down Mt. Rainier Railroad & Logging Museum.

WFIM was essentially “dormant” under AHR’s ownership, board members were all in CO/affiliated with AHR. IRS began an investigation into AHR’s acquisition of WFIM/MRSR – IRS ruled “against” AHR – large fines associated; they received notice about two weeks after the Covid-19 pandemic began. AHR decided to close the railroad. Staff was laid off, Brian remained the only employee to serve as caretaker, and later brought Tom Payne on to assist Brian.

David Baublits, the new Mayor-Elect of Eatonville began negotiating with AHR to assume control of WFIM and for reconveyance of the railroad in 2022; the reconveyance was finalized towards the end of August. WFIM now owns all assets except the GP, Tacoma Rail cars, and 13 acres at Park Junction – all of which we have a 4-year no/low-cost lease on.

Reviewed board composition ([www.wfim.org/our-team](http://www.wfim.org/our-team)).

WFIM working on purchasing the line from Eatonville to Morton from Tacoma Rail.

### Phased Reopening

#### *RailCycles*

Opening RailCycle Mt. Rainier (rail bike operation) in the spring. WFIM is designing its own railbikes. Randy brought up concerns over bridges and safety. Brian and Bethan discussed plans to add netting and temporary decking to the bridges to allow for enhanced safety, and adding decking to the railbikes. At Tim Daubert’s suggestion, gates/preventative measures will be added ahead of the Nisqually River bridge (highway side) to prevent trespassing.

Ryan brought up storage concerns, whether at Park Junction or in Mineral – the rail bikes need to be protected from vandalism. Bikes will be stored either in a facility or container at Park Junction or be deadheaded back to Mineral and stored behind closed gate. Brian mentioned that Park Junction has been cleaned up significantly and our “new” neighbors there are fantastic and supportive of the railroad.

WFIM has received a \$530,000 grant from Pierce County Lodging Tax grant funding for the development of the railbike operation which will run from Mineral to Park Junction. Profits from the railbike operations will be invested in the railroad and particularly, railroad rolling stock.

### *Railroad Operations*

Plans to stabilize fleet. Operating primarily with steam power, open cars, and the 900-series cars. Good consensus on operating with this consist.

Polson 70 is coming up on a 1472 in 2025 but is in good operating order. The 1472 is likely to be straightforward and a good volunteer/staff project. Bethan wants to ensure this locomotive is done and ready to go so we're not pulling locomotives out of service shortly after we open to the public.

The Hammond Lumber Co. 17 has issues with cracked stay bolts and a cracked rear tube sheet (ligaments). The boiler and repair work is extensive, as is truck work (pony & trailing trucks) – the general feeling is if we're performing repairs this extensive, it also makes sense to do a 1472 on the 17 and open with two solid locomotives.

Discussion of beginning larger restoration work on the 5 down the road as it's better suited for an Eatonville-based operation.

Major locomotive work will need to be funded by grants.

### *Administrative*

WFIM is really starting over. We weren't handed an operational business structure – most of the nonprofits' past bylaws/etc., are now outdated.

Insurance has been incredibly difficult to acquire. Insurers are hesitant to fund steam and volunteer-based railroad operations, partly due to the safety records of other tourist railroads (given that WFIM doesn't have recent operational records), and the danger of adverse environmental impacts. Insurance for maintenance operations is approximately \$32,000 annually which includes thorough agreements for volunteer background checks, safety training, and safety audits. Insurance will increase by approximately \$12,000 when revenue operations resume. Bethan discussed the need to balance safety, training, and "red-tape" requirements for volunteers with the ease of volunteering and having fun. Requirements and training for operating crews are still unknown. The goal is to have a collaborative process between the staff and volunteers to solve these issues in a way that is manageable.

Most work, capital projects, rolling stock restoration, etc., is going to be reliant on grant funding. Bethan is handling most of the grant writing but always appreciates help.

### *Finance*

Included in handout attachment. All income to date is donation-based.

Two grants received to date, \$530,000 for RailCycle startup and \$20,000 in matching funds for a portable restroom trailer.

All obligations and liens on the railroad, including the original loan to the Murray estate have been forgiven or paid so WFIM is currently debt free and owns all assets outright (except the aforementioned equipment leased from AHR).

### Volunteer Structure

Anyone interested in volunteering from home (historical research – particularly on key historical groups), social media management, grant writing, etc., should be coordinated with Bethan.

With minimal staffing, it's critical that volunteer projects are well organized and don't need a critical amount of employee attention, aside from volunteer work party weekends. For work projects during weekdays, volunteers should coordinate with Brian or Tom (on site) and ensure that the projects fit our priority list.

Currently brainstorming hosting volunteer work parties at the shop/site in Mineral. Brian and Tom are working on making bunks in the boxcar and Bethan suggested purchasing slightly "upgraded" cots or portable beds for housing in the log camp buildings, all of which have heat. With a weekend headcount, Bethan (& her family) will prepare food, barbecue, and ensure folks are well-fed for volunteer weekends.

Work project list is attached in handout.

The group decided on the following priorities:

- 1.) Background checks ASAP – Bethan will send out info
- 2.) Bethan will work on getting safety videos and quizzes out within next two weeks
- 3.) Google Form or poll to decide on a volunteer work weekend
- 4.) Project priorities should center around reopening the museum, cleaning and fixing exhibits, and cleaning grounds/buildings. Have both good and bad weather projects lined up.

### Open Discussion

Possibility of railcar storage.

Possible sites in Eatonville, grade issues of the former depot site.

Bethan is interested in setting up an endowment to use for 1472s on locomotives down the road – possible "seed" money from sale of utility rights from Eatonville to Morton.

General interest in diversifying income streams to fund railroad operations and equipment preservation.