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Newcomb town board moves to preserve railroad line by Nancy O'Brien

NEWCOMB – With an eye on the future, the Newcomb town board gifted the \$750,000 grant it received to the Essex County Industrial Development Agency in order to acquire the rail line in Tahawus.

Newcomb Supervisor George Canon said that the tract of land containing the rail line owned by National Lead (NL) was acquired by the Open Space Institute which will eventually sell it to the state. The rail line, if torn up, is worth an estimated \$1 million in salvage, but Canon and others don't want to see it go.

The \$750,000 grant was secured by Canon and the town from the governor's office to help keep the rail line in place for possible economic development. With money from Warren County and Barton Mines who also have interest in keeping the rail line in place, the total amount of money available to acquire the rights to the line is about \$1 million.

The rail line was put in place in 1944, Canon said, to transport ilmenite and magnetite from the mines at Tahawus for steel production. The mines closed in the 1980's due to a lack of demand for the minerals but there is still a lot of magnetite in the ground.

"There are still 50 million tons there," Canon said. "Parts of that piece of ground are still zoned industrial and there could be another widget factory that would need the rail line."

Canon said there are other possibilities for the rail line that has economic potential as well.

"It could become a snowmobile trail, but we'd need a lot of snow," he said. "Barton Mines has an interest in using it to transport product." He has his doubts about the success of a tourist train.

"I doubt a train ride all the way to Tahawus would be feasible, but there is a switchback in Minerva."

Johnsburg Supervisor Bill Thomas is a bit more optimistic about the potential for a tourist train. About five miles of the track runs between North Creek and Hamilton County, with the bulk of the line in Essex County.

He said a tourist train running north from North Creek would give visitors a whole different experience from the current line between North Creek, Riparius and Thurman.

"It's so pristine up that way," he said. "By keeping the rail line in place, we're keeping our options open."