

Work set to start soon on Topsfield rail trail

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TOPSFIELD — Construction will begin soon on the first section of the rail trail while a topographic survey of the next section is already in the works.

Late last month, selectmen approved a \$21,840 contract to K&R Construction of Boxford to build the first part of the Topsfield Linear Common. Last Monday, the board approved a \$2,450 contract for a survey for the next phase with Hancock Associates of Danvers. The survey is funded by the state Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Three years after the town signed a lease for the property owned by the MBTA, Joe Geller, chairman of Topsfield Rail Trail Committee, said he is pleased to be moving on to the next step.

"It's gratifying that we're at this point," Geller said, "but it's by no means over."

Phase I runs from Washington Street to Summer Street. In two to three weeks, equipment will move in to begin construction, Geller said.

"They will have to dig down through the topsoil to firmer ground and put stone dust on top of that," Geller said.

The path is 8 feet wide with shoulders that are 2 or 3 feet wide depending on location. As of now, Geller said, the path is just a railway that is overgrown in places. Volunteers have been mowing the southern half of the trail to make it passable.

"Construction should be completed by early June," Geller said.

Within the next few weeks, the Rail Trail Committee will begin surveying Phase II, which continues the trail from Summer Street to Route 1.

Unlike the first portion of the trail, Geller said the second part runs down the middle of public property, and he is therefore not as concerned about property lines.

But Geller said he is concerned about the wetlands at the last several hundred feet of the trail near Route 1.

"We have to work through the process with the Conservation Commission," Geller said. "We might stop the trail before the wetlands."

"The Rail Trail Committee is proceeding in accordance with their phased plan," Selectman Richard Gandt

said, "carefully measuring the steps within the resources and time frames that are available to them."

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