

# Rail wail

Topsfield's Rail-to-Trail Committee, formed in 2005, is leading the way to build a 4.5 mile rail trail from the Wenham town line to the Boxford town line near Pye Brook Park. The project would be developed in chunks, the first being a half-mile stretch connecting Main Street and Washington Street.

For a project as large as the proposed rail trail through Topsfield, there are certainly going to be those who oppose it. There are many valid issues that need to be addressed before the revitalized rail trail becomes reality: who will maintain it, what about the privacy of those whose back yards are closest to it and so on.

The most recent complaints against the rail trail come from a newly formed organization called the Coalition for Children's Safety and Serious Concerns Regarding the Proposed Topsfield Rail Trail Project. The coalition is led by Charles Robert "Bob" Morgan, a Washington Street homeowner. On July 9, Morgan and about five other coalition members spoke before the Topsfield Board of Selectmen. The group spent almost an hour going over a multi-page presentation with the main theme being that town officials have not handled the multi-phased project properly.

Much of the multi-page document prepared by the coalition resorts to what is little more than scare tactics. A good example is the comparison of the proposed rail trail to the existing Minuteman Bikeway that stretches through Cambridge, Arlington, Lexington and Bedford. The packet contained a copy of a recent newspaper article focusing on the clash between bikers and walkers on the busy path.

There is little chance Topsfield's stretch of the rail trail would ever exhibit the same kind of volume as the Minuteman Bikeway. Of the four communities, Bedford has the smallest population at around 12,000. Cambridge tops the list with more than 100,000. Topsfield is around 6,500. Of course, much of the traffic for the local trail would come from other communities. But to think that Topsfield's rail trail would generate even half the volume of the Minuteman trail is at the very least, unrealistic.

Another section of the packet talks about children's safety. The packet talks about the



## OFF DEADLINE

BY DAVID ROGERS

chances of a young child being struck by a passing bike or runner. Yes, trail officials may want to consider ways of keeping the section of trail behind Proctor Elementary as safe as possible. But whatever happened to parents or childcare providers keeping an eye on their children? To accent the point, the packet contains a photo of a small toddler on a swing with his father nearby. The only purpose in including such a photo is to raise fears among parents who otherwise might want to use the trail.

It is akin to a handful of West Boxford residents who voiced their displeasure to the noise and smell of a logging operation inside a Boxford farm. They too presented a large color packet to town officials to express their concerns. It included a cartoon image of a smiling young mother and her baby near a pile of logs stacked near a fence in West Boxford, implying that the pair could be crushed under the pile if it let go.

Finally, the lack of due process argument, the coalition uses comes across as transparent. The same argument has been used by other groups as a means to stall projects until they collapse. Back in 2005, the lack of due process was one of many arguments used by those opposed to renovations to the Amesbury Public Library. The main problem that many had with the library proposal was the planned demolition of the library's historic stack wing. The project, which had received millions in state funding, was killed off after a town-wide vote.

The coalition, which was scheduled to meet yesterday (Thursday), claims not to be against the project, but it wouldn't be surprising to learn that they would be happy to see the project founder. For some coalition members, the arguments against the trail may be nothing more than an example of the NIMBY (not in my back yard) principal. And that it includes its leader, Morgan, who lives very close to where the rail trail would be built.

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