

# State awards \$40K for Topsfield rail trail

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Construction of a Topsfield rail trail is on the right path after the state last Friday awarded the town \$40,000 to help build the downtown passive recreation trail.

"It allows us to move the project forward. It's like the best news we could get," Topsfield Rail-to-Trail Committee Chairman Joseph Geller said.

Geller said his group submitted a grant request for \$50,000. And while the amount is less than first hoped for, the money likely will be used to prepare a conceptual

design for the project and to submit bid proposal paperwork.

"And hopefully the construction itself," Geller said.

Any expenditures would first have to be approved by the Board of Selectmen. The grant money, according to the state, was awarded to the town and not the Rail-to-Trail Committee.

"Recreational trails help connect communities, provide recreational opportunities and offer an alternative to driving," said DCR Commissioner Rick Sullivan.

As part of the Department of Conservation and Recreation grant, the town will have to set

aside \$10,000 for what is being called the Topsfield Linear Common Greenway. But Geller said Monday the matching funds could be in the form of volunteer labor, materials and use of equipment.

"It can be contribution in kind," Geller said. "It's not our intention to go to the town for funds."

About half of the in-kind contributions may come from the town's Historical Society. Geller said the society has pledged to donate a granite marker to be placed by the proposed rail trail to commemorate the town's train

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history.

The 4.5-mile rail trail project would be built on an abandoned railroad bed formerly owned by the MBTA that goes through town starting at the Wenham town line and ends at the Boxford town line near Pye Brook. Geller said he hopes to have the first phase of the project under way by this winter. The first phase, about a third of a mile long, would run from Washington Street to Summer Street. Instead of asphalt the trail would be made mostly of stone dust.

The project has its detractors. This summer a group of residents near the proposed site for phase one formed a coalition and accused the Rail-to-Trail Committee of keeping residents in the dark regarding the project. Many of

those in the Coalition for Children's Safety and Serious Concerns Regarding the Proposed Topsfield Rail Trail Project live close to where the first phase would go.

The committee is expected to go before selectmen next week to seek approval to submit another \$50,000 grant proposal to the DCR.

"But there are a lot of other things that we're going to ask the selectmen to approve," Geller said.

Geller said they would also ask selectmen to OK sending a request to the MBTA to place temporary decking over a series of railroad ties so that people can walk over a bridge just south of where the rail-trail crosses Route 97.