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## Letter: Rail trails in other communities

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TOPSFIELD -  
To the editor:

Some Topsfield residents are understandably concerned about privacy issues with the proposed recreation path. While it may be difficult to convince all trail neighbors that the trail we call the Topsfield Linear Common will become a valued part of our community, we can learn from past experience in Topsfield and other towns in New England.

In 1976 Mary Johnson of Topsfield was successful in getting state grants for the bicentennial project of building two bike paths in town. One goes from the center of town to North Street to access Klock Park and the other from the center of town to Hood Pond. Recently, she mentioned to me that the bike path "sidewalks" raised abutter concerns of privacy, litter and the safety of children riding their bikes to those recreation areas. With all the use these bike paths get from walkers, joggers, and bikers today — could you imagine Topsfield doing without those paths?

In our part of Massachusetts there are recreational paths in Salisbury, Amesbury and Newburyport. Those trails have been so well accepted that all of those towns have added or are in the process of adding additional trails.

A 2001 article in the *Hartford Courant* talks about the Avon, Connecticut Rails-to-Trails path where the town council has agreed to remove more than 2 miles of chain-link fencing along the trail in response to the request of the trail neighbors. "The fencing, which was installed years ago to ease the security and privacy concerns of some homeowners, is not needed after all and is unattractive, other neighbors told the town council recently."

The paved path was created in the late 1990s along the old Boston & Maine Railroad route. It became a place where residents go to chat, get exercise and enjoy their community, the nearby homeowners say.

"After years of listening to the choo-choo train going through, it's a pleasure to watch the bikers and walkers go through there," said resident Susan Namerow, whose home abuts the trail. "It seems to be a really friendly situation, and I wouldn't like to see it changed." Namerow and other residents surveyed homeowners whose property abuts the trail and found that they overwhelmingly supported the removal of the fencing.

Town council members responded enthusiastically. "I've had utterly no problems with it whatsoever. I agree with my neighbors that the trail is a wonderful thing," said resident William Longstreet, who bought his home from a man who opposed the trail, but then used it as a selling point. Proximity to the trail has been advertised as an attractive feature in many homes on the market, said Town Planner Steven Kushner. "They feel the trail is really a significant asset," he said.

As evidenced by the high level of support in the 1999 and 2004 Topsfield town surveys as part of the Open Space Plan, your Rail Trail Committee believes the Topsfield Linear Common will be have a similar positive impact in Topsfield.

Joe Geller  
Chairman,  
Topsfield Rail Trail Committee  
Comments (0)

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