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## Letter: Grants, gifts and generosity for the Topsfield Rail Trail

Wed Apr 16, 2008, 05:30 PM EDT

TOPSFIELD -

To the editor:

The 3.9 mile-long abandoned railroad bed that goes through Topsfield, which we call the Topsfield Linear Common (TLC), has the potential to be a wonderful asset for the Town of Topsfield. One of the concerns that has been raised with the trail is the potential cost to the Town. We would like to take this opportunity to clarify that the Topsfield Selectmen created the Rail Trail Committee with the understanding that the construction funds will come from the three G's: grants, gifts and the generosity of volunteers. As we have demonstrated, the three G's have gotten us to where we are today. This includes raising the necessary matching funds for the grants through volunteer efforts and donations.

At the Topsfield Town Meeting on May 6, there will be a citizens warrant article to be voted on that will attempt to stop trail construction activity for about two years (until the State funded 25 percent design is completed). If that happens we will lose \$42,000 in grant money. Two days later, at the May 8 town election, the Topsfield Selectmen have a referendum item on the ballot asking if the trail has the town's support. No mention of cost is in the wording of the ballot item, but, as stated above, we are fully aware that the funding from the trail needs to come from the three G's.

You may have heard estimates of millions of dollars per mile for trail construction and tens of thousands per mile for annual maintenance. While these numbers are what some trails cost, what we have planned for Topsfield is significantly different. Our stone dust trail will cost a small fraction of that to construct, especially since we are building on a former rail bed. Estimates from other soft surface trails reveal the annual maintenance cost is about \$700 per mile when done by a volunteer organization (based on a study by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Northeast Regional Office). Who will pay for that? The Friends of Topsfield Trails, a new non-profit organization, has been formed to support the trail through grants, gifts and volunteer generosity. We plan to build the trail as funds are raised and although it may take years to complete, today we have the funding necessary to work on the first phase. Between the Rail Trail Committee and the "Friends," we will take the responsibility of keeping the trail clean and safe in the future.

Thanks to the Topsfield Rail Trail Committee and their dedicated volunteers, the trail has been cleared from the Wenham to the Boxford town lines to aid in the planning design of the trail and to increase awareness within Topsfield. What was the cost of this activity to Topsfield? It was zero. All work was happily done by volunteers using their own equipment and supplies

Your Rail Trail Committee has already raised \$42,000 in grants but the Selectmen have not given the approval to spend any of these funds on construction because of objections to the trail raised by the Coalition for Neighborhood Information. We believe that \$42,000 is adequate to design, do the

necessary permitting and build Phase 1A, the centerpiece of the TLC, which goes from Main Street to Washington Street. We have garnered the support of the Selectmen, Topsfield School Committee, Highway Departments, Recreation Committee and the Planning Board for this project. We are also working closely with the Police department. We sincerely hope we'll have your support as well. With good results at Town Meeting and the ballot question, the Selectmen will "pave" the way for our stone dust trail.

For more information we invite you to visit [www.TopsfieldTrail.Org](http://www.TopsfieldTrail.Org).

Joe Geller  
Chairman

## Topsfield Rail Trail Committee

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