

Letters to the Editor

TLC will provide many benefits

To the editor:

The Topsfield Linear Common is all about bringing people together, but trail trails are often seen in a narrow perspective when it comes to their benefits. Some tend to focus mostly on the recreation side, which is great, but there is a much bigger picture to consider. The benefits include public health, economic and transportation benefits, and even the effect on community pride and identity.

The TLC will provide healthy recreation and transportation opportunities by providing people of all ages with attractive, safe, accessible no-cost places to cycle, walk, hike or jog and will help people of all ages incorporate exercise into their daily routines by connecting them with the village, Pye Brook Community Park, the Fairgrounds and other places in town.

The TLC will provide access to beautiful green spaces and wetlands that are now inaccessible. As tools for ecology and conservation, trails help preserve important natural landscapes, provide needed links between fragmented habitats, and offer tremendous opportunities for protecting plant and animal species. They also can be useful tools for wetland preservation, education and improvement of air and water quality. In addition, they can allow humans to experience

nature with minimal environmental impact.

Recreational trails have become sources of community identity and pride. With the revitalization of the downtown including several new businesses and buildings, such as Topsfield Station, which is right on the TLC, the needed improvements in the appearance of downtown Topsfield is starting to be something of which we can be proud.

In our previous two letters to the editor in the *Town Transcript* we talked about the funding of the TLC using the 3Gs — grants, gifts and generosity. We also discussed how well recreational paths were initially received and, how, after a few years, other New England communities have come to embrace them. How can Topsfield afford the TLC? It is not by asking the voters of Topsfield for funding. So far, we have received generous grants from the state Department of Recreation and Conservation, the Essex National Heritage Commission and the U.S. National Park Service. With several other towns we have also received all the needed funding to get us to the '25 percent' design stage. This grant provides wetland delineation, surveying the entire trail, design considerations, signage for safety, and the very important question concerning how the trail will safely cross Route 97 and Route 1 near the Topsfield Fairgrounds.

On May 6 at Town Meeting we encourage you to vote against Article 16 and for the TLC on May 8 at Town Election. Article 16 asks to delay any trail construction until after the 25 percent design is completed. We feel this is unnecessary for Phase I. If Article 16 passes we will forfeit \$42,000 in grant money that has to be spent before the 25 percent design is completed.

Many of the questions proposed in Article 16 have already been satisfactorily addressed by the responsible town departments, as it is their responsibility. For instance, public safety and accidents are the domain of the Police and Fire departments, while environmental issues are the domain of the Conservation Commission. The effect of the TLC on abutter's property values can only be estimated. Information from other Massachusetts trails indicates property values rise by about 5 percent. Adverse effects on the abutters are another question addressed in Article 16.

We think the TLC would be much less intrusive than restoring train service as has been done in other Massachusetts communities, such as Ipswich, Rowley, Newbury, Newburyport, where service ceased in 1976. Abutters in other communities who had been previously been skeptical have shown strong support for trails

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after they are completed. They are used by many in the community including the abutters themselves having the closest access to the trail.

Given the increased incidence of preventable public health issues, such as diabetes and obesity, we think the cost of not building the trail could ultimately be greater if we didn't take advantage of this wonderful asset sooner rather than later.

For lots more information we invite you to visit www.TopsfieldTrailOrg.com, e-mail us at Trail@Topsfield-Ma.gov, join us at a committee meeting in Town Hall, or give us a call.

Joe Geller, chairman
Topsfield Rail Trail Committee

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