

# Letter: Rail Trail vote —good for residents

TOPSFIELD - To the editor:

Thank you for your editorial (“Selectmen miss golden opportunity,” *Tri-Town Transcript*, Friday, April 18, 2008) concerning my application for membership to the Rail Trail Committee. I would like to clarify one thing: the editorial implied that I am opposed to the Rail Trail. I have said (and believe) that a well constructed and designed trail may be a benefit to Topsfield and a poorly designed and built trail will be a disaster. In this sense I am a critic but not opposed to the trail. I was committed to working in the committee to solve problems without rancor and more fully inform the public about the trail.

The actions of the Selectmen continue a pattern that started last July when the CNI presented a list of problems to the Selectmen. At first they encouraged several CNI members to become members. Later they decided that they did not want any abutters as members of the Rail Trail because of ethics issues. When we called the state ethics committee we found out that abutters could be members (under certain conditions). I submitted my application and went through the process of writing resume and goal statements. This included a long interview with the Rail Trail Committee. What we need on the committee is a diversity of views that can work together to answer all of the goals and problems of the Rail Trail – and I committed to that. The Selectmen decided that they did not want that – sad. Incidentally the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy ([www.railtrails.org](http://www.railtrails.org)) recommends the appointment of an advisory committee of abutters and town residents to perform some of the role I was proposing to do. This has been suggested to the Rail Trail Committee a number of times – and ignored.

We have had these repeated arguments about the safety of the trail. I submit that each Topsfield resident can be an expert on this issue. Go to the region between Proctor School playground and the Grove Street playground. Imagine the number of children playing there. Now imagine an 8-foot-wide stone dust trail running between them between Washington Street and Main Street. There are three obvious problems that everyone can see. First, children are running actively back and forth between the playground and the woods. Consider the issues involved with bicycles and horses coming down that trail. Secondly the town has had problems with groups of young people congregating in the shopping center parking lot. This trail now provides them easy access to other parts of town (for example Hippie Hill). This means more policing and problems for neighbors. Thirdly, there is the problem of crossing Washington Street and Main Street. These are real problems which I had hoped to address as a member of the committee.

This means that Town Meeting Warrant Article 16 is all the more important. The article states that Topsfield needs a high-level design for the Rail Trail before any construction is performed. The design must answer a list of questions concerning safety, development

and maintenance costs and effects on neighbors. When the design is completed it must be brought before the Town Meeting for Town approval. This is neither a pro or anti Rail Trail article: people for and against the trail support it. It simply states that we should do a proper design of the trail and address the obvious questions. So vote for this article at town meeting. As the events of the last year show, this is the only way that the residents of Topsfield can get significant input into the building of this path/park through the middle of Topsfield.

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Topsfield