

Town supports rail trail in non-binding question

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Two of Topsfield's most well-known officials made a successful jump from one board to another last Thursday winning spots on the Board of Selectmen.

Planning Board veteran Martha Morrison and Council on Aging Chairman Nancy Luther garnered enough votes to grab the two open seats on the Board of Selectmen, with 919 and 674 votes respectively.

One of the spots was made available when Selectman Steve Clark announced he wouldn't be running for another term. The second slot came at the expense of Chairman John McArdle who was running for another term but finished last out of four candidates with 451 votes. Town Hall Building Committee chairman Heidi Fox was the fourth candidate and came in third with 462 votes.

Voters also gave extra credence

to the idea of converting an abandoned rail bed into a stone-dust recreation path as part of the multi-community Rail Trail. Residents chose to support the construction of the bike path through Topsfield by almost 350 votes (863 to 515) in a non-binding question on the ballot. Earlier this week at Town Meeting, Topsfield taxpayers chose not to vote on a petition article that would have delayed the trail.

The Border to Boston proposal boasts a 27.8-mile trail to run on top of the historic and abandoned Maine to Boston railway, running from Salisbury to the Danvers/Peabody border. The proposed trail is set to run through Boxford, Danvers, Georgetown, Newbury, Newburyport, Salisbury, Topsfield, and Wenham.

A neighborhood group called the Coalition for Neighborhood Information has been opposing

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the rail trail in Topsfield, and has spoken at many selectmen's meetings regarding their concerns about the trail.

A happy Rail Trail Committee Chairman Joe Geller said the results at Town Meeting and the town election show Topsfield's support for a rail trail.

"I think this is a clear mandate that the town wants it," Geller said.

Where the coalition had questioned the town's opinion toward the rail trail, Geller feels that this should give them the answer they were seeking.

"I would hope they would be satisfied," Geller said, adding that all abutters' concerns would be addressed.

As the rail trail was hotly debated over the past few months and there were four capable candidates for the most powerful board in town, Town Clerk Beverly Guarino thought voter turnout would've been higher.

Her office reported that 35 per-

cent, or 1,423 out of 4,094 registered voters, came to the polls that day.

"You would have anticipated a bigger turnout," Guarino said about how she felt the two issues would have sparked more interest. "To me, it's a little discouraging."

While she admitted the voter turnout was comparable to other election years, she felt this year would have shown a spike. Guarino commented that she feels town elections these days are a forum for special interest groups.

The other contested race featured three candidates for two Elementary School Committee seats. Incumbent Jeffery Evaul and Susan Archer won the spots, besting PTO member Pamala Jefferys.

Running unopposed, Moderator John Kinhan received 1140 votes, the most votes of any candidate.

Howlett Street resident Jonathon Young grabbed a Planning Board seat through 51 write-ins and incumbent Robert Winship took the other open seat.