

More money secured for rail trail

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The proposed Topsfield rail trail just received a \$50,000 funding boost to go toward design and construction costs of the 4-mile bike path through town.

The state Department of Conservation and Recreation allows communities to apply for a grant every

year that can be used toward conservation and recreation projects. The Topsfield Rail Trail was awarded the 2006 DCR grant and, just this week, the 2007 grant.

Rail Trail Committee Chairman Joe Geller told selectmen Monday of the good news just after they approved an application for the 2008 version of a similar DCR grant.

"It appears we got the full amount," Geller said.

The Topsfield Rail Trail received the maximum amount for the 2007 DCR grant at \$50,000 matching funds. This means the state pays for 80 percent and the town pays 20 percent, \$12,500, putting the final amount of the grant at \$62,500. The 2006 grant was for \$40,000.

Selectman Chairman Boyd Jackson asked Geller if all towns that apply for this grant receive it or if the state just likes the Topsfield Rail Trail.

"I think they (the state) like the way we comb our hair," Geller said about the way the Topsfield Rail Trail applies for these grants and the thoroughness involved.

The Topsfield Rail Trail has spent roughly \$7,000 of grant money so far. Some of that money went toward a land survey on the first phase of the Topsfield Rail Trail, which extends from Washington Street to Main Street.

The town's matching share of the 2007 grant will come from gifts or generosity, as the Topsfield Rail Trail had vowed not to use a cent of

taxpayer money. Also, Geller said that Rail Trail Committee members could keep track of their volunteer time, which can be translated by the state into matching grant money from the town.

At Monday's Selectmen meeting, Geller also spoke about a meeting he had with MassHighway last week.

As part of the regional group planning the Border to Boston Coalition, representatives from MassHighway said they are hoping to begin a land survey of the 29-mile piece of abandoned railroad bed set to house the bike path. Next, MassHighway said they are planning on identifying all of the wetlands that exist along the railroad tracks.

The trail is set to run through Salisbury, Newbury, Newburyport, Georgetown, Boxford, Topsfield, Danvers, and Wenham.

The funding received this week from the state is reserved specifically for Topsfield and is in addition to the some \$800,000 in federal funding that was recently restored to help design the entire 29-mile Border to Boston bike path.

The Federal Highway Department pulled the \$800,000 in late July due to a misunderstanding over the purpose of the funding. The funding was restored in late August with the help of U.S. Rep. John Tierney, D-Salem, and the letters sent by many local and state legislators and officials.

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