

Rail Trail Committee hopes to break ground in March

By Brendan Lewis
blewis@cnc.com

The Topsfield Rail Trail Committee will soon be going out to bid for the first section of the Rail Trail following a forum that is geared to produce critical feedback from abutters on certain details of the project.

Rail Trail Committee chairman Joe Geller said that the forum, scheduled for Monday, Dec. 8, at 8 p.m. at the Gould Barn, will focus on the layout of phase 1A of the trail and the use of fences and trees as buffers.

"People are going to be concerned about privacy," Geller said about the many residences that abut the trail. Geller said they have already spoken to some abutters about fences and other barriers between the trail and private property.

Before the forum, the Rail Trail Committee also hopes to collect the comments from the selectmen and other boards and committees about the preliminary rail trail designs.

The Rail Trail Committee was formed in 2005 to oversee the planning, construction, and main-

tenance of a 4-mile bike and horse trail from the Boxford town line to the Hamilton town line. The trail is set to join a 29-mile bike trail from Salisbury to Danvers that would also run through Newburyport, Newbury, Georgetown, Boxford, Topsfield and Wenham.

A regional task force is also working to help develop the entire trail designed to run from Salisbury to Danvers. The group, called the Border to Boston Coalition, has obtained grant money to help the towns involved with right of way issues as well as wetland protection issues.

Once the meeting is completed, Geller said this group will be actively searching for a contractor to level out and pave phase 1A of the trail, which runs from Washington Street to Main Street. The trail design calls for a stone dust surface.

The Rail Trail Committee is hoping expedite phase 1A as quickly as possible so they can begin work on Phase 1B of the trail, which runs from Main Street to Summer Street.

"We're hoping to start [phase 1A] in March," Rail Trail Com-

mittee member Roy Baessler.

Geller said the committee has already sent letters out to those who live next to phase 1B of the trail. So far, he said they received a response from one South Main Street resident, who thought the trail was a "great" project.

The Topsfield Rail Trail recently received the maximum amount for the 2007 Department of Conservation and Recreation grant at \$50,000, in which the state pays 80 percent. They received the same grant in 2006 for \$40,000.

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

While the Topsfield volunteer group is hoping to construct most of the trail with their own grant money, committee members did say that they will be seeking help from the regional coalition when devising a strategy to cross Route 1.

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