

# Rails to Trails hinges on lease signing

**By Faye Raynard**

A lease signing for the MBTA rails-to-trails venture was held off once again by the Topsfield selectmen last week. As the Rails to Trails Committee awaited a decision on the signing, the board felt that more scrutiny of the legal language is needed before signing the document.

“The piece of property on Grove Street recently went through the 21E environmental testing. I understand that it is clean and that there is no problem with it,” said Selectmen Boyd Jackson. He was referring to the property that was recently put up for auction where the abandoned freight barn sits today.

Topsfield Rails to Trails

Chairman Joe Geller said that recently Newburyport was considering an agreement to create a trail through Newburyport. Other communities such as Stoneham, Woburn, Somerville and Cambridge have all signed leases with the MBTA, according to Geller. “We are anxious to move on this,” he added.

Crossing route 1 with the trail, liability for injuries and bikers in spandex were all issues to be addressed as part of trail concerns, said Selectman John McArdle.

Geller said that perhaps a traffic ‘walk’ light could be incorporated at the route 1 intersection with the trail. Liability issues are already covered under legislation that addresses recent environmental

concerns on the trail; and bikers in spandex would still use the roadway and not be interested in the trail—it is meant for walking, baby carriages and children on bikes, according to the advocates.

“You should consider the possibility of writing a position paper, putting in words where you are coming from and that you don’t intend to use town moneys,” McArdle told Geller. He added that he thought it was a great idea but “doesn’t want the town to get into anything sticky or expensive.”

Meanwhile, selectmen endorsed the seeking of a grant that the Rails to Trails committee hope to obtain, together with other communities. Moneys would be used to develop brochures and printed materials.