

# Rail trail proponents get ready for development

by Faye Hayward

One week after a town vote approved the first phase of the proposed Topsfield Rail Trail, the Topsfield Rail Trail Committee is ready to start laying the groundwork.

Chairman Joe Geller said they will get a quote for the layout for the first portion of the trail, from Washington Street to Main Street.

Residents abutting the Phase 1A plan for the trail appeared at the Rail Trail meeting on May 19 seeking answers to how the planning and construction will proceed.

The Rail Trail has \$42,000 in funds with a priority of things to do with the money, said Geller.

Robert Morgan of the CNI (Coalition for Neighborhood Information) group said the future of the rail trail in Topsfield will depend on how Phase 1A progresses.

"If it is done in a way that makes abutters unhappy, you will have a very hard time getting anything done down the track," Morgan cautioned. "If you do a job that considers everyone's point of view in a humane fashion—that is, you listen, you will have a much better chance of getting the rail trail through."

Morgan suggests that simply putting down stone dust won't make everyone happy.

David Read of the Rail Trail

Committee said Trail proponents simply have to find more money through grants and donated services. He added, "We need to have everyone work with us, otherwise, it will be a setting in the neighborhood with everyone with their hatchets up," said Read.

Geller said there are 120 properties on the trail, which would encompass four miles through Topsfield when and if completed. The plan is to work on portions of the trail in phases. As proposed, it would be done without tapping local tax dollars, the committee said.

Read said he would like to see a small group of the neighbors working with the design firm on the initial phase. Gathering this input and keeping the doors of communication open is important, Read emphasized. Eastgate Landscape Design has offered to do a trail site design, which would address privacy issue concerns for abutters. After initial walks with Eastgate's Dan Peabody, the committee said they would set up an informal meeting with abutters.

Kathleen Didonato had questions about future meetings of the Rail Trail Committee. She was told that the committee doesn't meet on a set schedule, however meetings are posted and concerned abutters will be notified in advance of upcoming sessions. There is also information posted on the town website, the commit-

tee advised.

Read has called for his committee to continue providing published updates and holding informational forums during the design and construction process.

Kathleen Carlson said she looked forward to the trail amenities. She recalled that when she was a youngster in 1972 she would ride her pony downtown, and stop in for an ice cream at Fraher's soda fountain. It is planned that an ice cream shop will border the trail once it is a vital link to the downtown area.

In the meantime, the Rail Trail Committee will offer its services toward mowing the trails. They agreed to modify the start time to later in the morning as volunteers plan to trim back the sides of the trail to help reduce the spread of ticks.

Morgan also suggested that the abutters be resurveyed with more directed questions and that the results be sent to the grant funding agency. Since the committee did not have a full quorum of the board, no decision was made on this request.

"We need a more competent survey of what the neighbors think," said Morgan.

In other business, the board noted that Nancy Luther who has been an integral part of the Rail Trail Committee has resigned from the board after being elected to serve on the Board of Selectmen.