



September 2012 Newsletter

What's the plan to build the Squannacook River Rail Trail?

In a nutshell, the plan is to have the non-profit Squannacook Greenways build the trail. Squannacook Greenways is a local 501(c)(3) non-profit whose mission is to build the Squannacook River Rail Trail. Squannacook Greenways is following the vision for building this rail trail laid out by the official Townsend and Groton town committees. That vision was that a non-profit should build the rail trail, following the successful example of Wachusett Greenways and the Mass Central Rail Trail.

The rail bed in Townsend and Groton is owned by the MBTA, and in order to build the rail trail, a governmental body needs to sign the MBTA lease. This lease requires the governmental entity that signs it to accept responsibility for environmental issues. Both Townsend and Groton have expressed reservations about accepting that liability, and so Squannacook Greenways turned to the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) for help.

Squannacook Greenways proposed that DCR sign the MBTA lease, and that Squannacook Greenways would sign a memorandum of agreement with DCR giving Squannacook Greenways sole responsibility for construction and maintenance of the rail trail.



Squannacook Greenways reaches agreement with DCR to proceed with Squannacook River Rail Trail

Squannacook Greenways has been working with Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) for the past year to verify our commitment to building and maintaining the Squannacook River Rail Trail. We have written a detailed business plan, raised over \$10,000 from our Board of Directors alone, and gathered numerous letters of support.

On May 24, 2012, members of the Squannacook Greenways board met with DCR Commissioner Lambert and members of his staff, and reached a conditional verbal agreement to move ahead with the plan described above. Commissioner Lambert requested that Squannacook Greenways buy environmental insurance and name DCR as an additional insured. He also asked that both the towns of Groton and Townsend put in writing those

ways in which they have already agreed to assist in the building of the rail trail.

For Townsend, that commitment is to pursue the building of approximately 900 feet of sidewalk in the Townsend Harbor area. Building this sidewalk was a key recommendation in the Townsend rail trail committee's report, because it removed a number of serious concerns in that area. The town would only need to do the sidewalk design, funding for which has already been approved in a previous town meeting. The state has committed to covering the actual construction cost.

In Groton the letter of support will include, among other things, possible help with maintenance. Also, we would need both towns to commit to providing standard police support for the trail.

Every member of the Squannacook Greenways Board would like to thank Commissioner Lambert for supporting us and making this trail possible. In an era of tight budgets, he has found a groundbreaking way to use public-private partnerships to get more done for the people of our state while using fewer resources. Once the agreement with DCR is complete, Squannacook Greenways is planning on launching membership and fundraising drives. We will also be starting trail walks. After permits have been granted, we will be holding volunteer days to start work on the trail. We look forward to working together as a community to bring this trail to reality.



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Townsend Board of Selectmen still considering letter of support – the rail trail may hang in the balance

On Aug. 14, 2012, members of the Squannacook Greenways Board of Directors met with the Townsend Board of Selectmen to ask for the letter of commitment required as part of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) agreement. The two commitments requested were 1) to pursue the building of approximately 900 feet of sidewalk in the Townsend Harbor area, and 2) to provide standard policing of the rail trail.

Steve Meehan started the presentation by pointing out that for years the Townsend Board of Selectmen had insisted on two criteria for support for the rail trail – no direct costs to the town, and no environmental liability to the town. Steve pointed out that the Squannacook Greenways approach meets both those requirements.

In spite of that, reaction from the Board of Selectmen was mixed. One selectman voiced strong support for moving ahead. Another indicated opposition to the request, in spite of the issues of environmental liability and cost to the town being resolved. A third indicated preliminary support, pending feedback from Chief Marshall. Ultimately, a vote on the issue was delayed until the desired feedback from Police Chief Marshall could be obtained.



A common sight in Townsend on Route 119 now.

The sidewalk diversion is critical to the plan. If the Townsend Board of Selectmen do reject this proposal, the future of the rail trail would be in serious jeopardy. The result could be that another entire generation of Townsend's children will be deprived of the chance to safely ride their bikes from one part of town to another.

Plans for abutter outreach

Squannacook Greenways has committed itself from the beginning to working fairly with all abutters. To that end, the committee recruited two abutters to the Nashua River Rail Trail to be board members – Peter Cunningham and Bob Hargraves. Bob Hargraves is not only a well respected former state representative for Townsend and Groton, he is also a particularly close abutter to the Nashua River Rail Trail. Our non-profit is committed to working fairly with abutters to address their concerns, and we are proud to have such uniquely qualified individuals working on abutter outreach.

Direct negotiations with abutters are scheduled to begin once a written conditional agreement with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) is in place.

Rail trail construction will inject one-half a million dollars into the local economy

While stone dust rail trails are less expensive than paved ones, our estimated budget for construction of the Squannacook River Rail Trail is nevertheless just over \$500,000. This budget was developed after extensive consultation with another local non-profit that has successfully built 16 miles of stone dust rail trail – Wachusett Greenways. This money will be raised through grants and fundraising. Given the challenging economic times we are in, spending this amount of money can only boost the local economy. The Squannacook River Rail Trail will not only provide recreation and safe non-motorized transportation options – it will boost the local economy too!



A young cyclist passing by Squannacook Greenway board member Bob Hargraves' home on the Nashua River Rail Trail. Bob has over ten years experience as a close abutter to a rail trail.