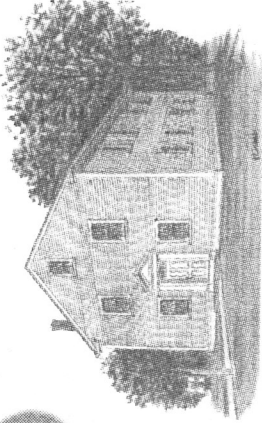




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Recreation Path Committee reaching out to abutters

By MAUREEN DOHERTY

LYNNFIELD — After well over a decade of advocacy, proponents of Lynnfield's rail trail initiative are excited about the progress being made to bring the project to fruition.

The next crucial step for members of the Recreation Path Committee (RPC) is continuing their outreach to the trail's abutters. There are approximately 61 abutters to the trail in town, according to RPC Chairwoman Janet Long, and the committee has reached out to all of them seeking input. In addition to the public hearing held in April, outreach has included a postcard mailing informing all abutters of project, inviting them to participate in a survey and direct-

ing them to the group's new website, www.lynnfieldrailtrail.org.

A second mailing will be sent soon, according to past chairman and current RPC member Dick Simmons. All abutters and interested townspeople will also be invited to walk portions of the abandoned railroad bed with committee members in the fall. Arrangements are also being made to provide tours of trails in other communities with the public to learn firsthand how those towns were able to turn skeptics of similar rail trail conversions into advocates. And all of the RPC meetings are open to the public.

The one thing that won't happen this fall is town meeting action on the project. Simmons said that while their initial goal was to get a warrant article ready for October, they have since decided it would best to wait until April Town Meeting at the earliest. They'll use the next six months to continue gathering input from abutters as to the type of screening and buffering measures they would prefer to enable it to be incorporated into the design plans.

Project parameters

The rail trail initiative seeks to re-purpose 4.4 miles of the abandoned Newburyport Railroad bed from Wakefield to Lynnfield. Starting in Wakefield across from the Galvin Middle School, which is about one mile away from the Wakefield commuter rail station, the path would run 1.9 miles through Wakefield, pass under I-95 and travel 2.5 miles through Lynnfield to the Peabody border.

Its route through Lynnfield would provide off-road access through six-tenths of a mile of Reedy Meadow and then pass behind the middle school and its fields, continuing alongside the Reedy Meadow Golf Course and crossing at Summer Street. It would then continue behind

Westover Drive to the rear of the high school and its new playing fields before crossing Pillings Pond Road to Peabody.

The trail could eventually be linked with rail trails in various stages of design or completion in Peabody, Danvers, Topsfield and other communities.

While the project stagnated for several years following the recession, the release of state and federal funding in the past few years enabled Wakefield, which serves as the lead agency, to contract with a design firm, WorldTech Engineering of Woburn, in 2013.

Both towns launched the preliminary design phase this spring with public informational meetings and a call for input from the townspeople and more volunteers to assist the town's RPC in creating a path that meets the needs of the town, the abutters and the community at large.

Committee expands

Long and Simmons have been joined by two new members on the committee, Mark McDonough and Joe Markey, who were both appointed by the selectmen in June.

Later this month, the committee will recommend that the selectmen

appoint one more member, Kate Ferency, whose volunteer service to date has proven invaluable in spreading the word about the rail trail.

Long said, "Kate is brand new to town. She came to our meetings within four days of moving to town very interested in the rail trail and she has since set us up with a website and put us on Facebook and Twitter." Long and Simmons readily admit that they are not savvy about social media but as Long explained, "We know that social media will be a very important way to get our story out and engage people."

Keri Connors is also new to town and an abutter to the rail trail. Her husband attended their first meeting six weeks ago, Long said, expressing "special concerns and questions" as an abutter but also having "overall a more positive sense of the trail." Keri subsequently stepped forward to volunteer on behalf of the committee. Pushing a baby stroller through her neighborhood, she initiates conversations with her neighbors about the rail trail. "She is a marketing/PR person and a super powerhouse. We are really glad to have both of these ladies," Long said.

Screening requests needed now

Asked if there is a budget for screening to replace the trees and bushes that have grown through the unused rails over many years and

which currently provide screening for many abutters, Simmons said yes.

"That is part of the design phase and outreach. We want to make sure that they get their voices heard and also we want to make sure that they give us input. In the development of the rail trail there will be money to make the abutters feel comfortable with the rail trail, or as comfortable as they can be," Simmons explained, adding that this is "one of the most important parts of this process."

Knowing the screening and buffering budget will be determined directly from the abutters' input makes their outreach efforts over the next six months crucial. Now is the time for abutters to speak up so WorldTech can design a screening plan "that is appealing and works for the abutters. That's why we need this time, so that that can be built into the rail trail budget," Simmons said.

While 61 properties about the trail, not all have homes on them, so in addition to reaching out by using traditional and social media, as well as direct mail, committee members will go door to door to continue their outreach efforts.

"People have told us that privacy is the most significant concern and as Dick indicated, fortunately we have some nice answers for that. Getting a chance to talk to people about that is something that we really look for-

ward to, so our next phase is to go door to door in the fall," Long said.

A unique feature of this rail trail that will separate it from others in the area and help elevate its potential for state and federal funding is the fact that the railroad bed already runs through the Reedy Meadow, which is a nationally recognized and protected resource, Long said.

If this rail trail was being built from scratch it would have needed to be diverted around the marsh. However, since this area was historically disturbed the improvements created by the trail will be allowed. They will seek to minimize further disturbance while also enabling trail users to access a marsh they might never have seen. The RPC is currently working with the Conservation Commission to coordinate planning and permitting.

Long said one of the ideas being floated about is to use the existing rails to create the trail surface through the marsh with flatbeds rather than attempting to tear out the old tracks and build a new path.

Honoring Donald Harriss

The trail does not officially have a name. Over the years, it has been referred to as the Reedy Meadow Rail Trail or just the Lynnfield-Wakefield Rail Trail. Neither rings true with Simmons. "If I had my druthers I'd rather have it called the Don Harriss Rail Trail because Don did an awful lot for the town and deserves having his name preserved in perpetuity. He was a great man," Simmons said.

"Don has contributed so much to this town I would absolutely love to see him get his due and to be recognized. He was a townie. His father was in the town before him and they both contributed an extraordinary amount to this town. He was a big part of the rail trail too," Simmons said, revealing this was also the first time he publicly stated this idea for the trail's name.