

Tour shows glimpse of rail trail possibilities

By Kathy Uek / News Staff Writer
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FRAMINGHAM -- More than 20 local residents previewed the Cochituate Rail Trail hidden behind swaying oak, buckthorn and maple trees while traffic whizzed by its entrance on Old Connecticut Path in Framingham.

Shuffling fallen oak and maple leaves, the crowd walked along the lush wooden three-quarter mile trail, the first section of the Cochituate Rail Trail expected to officially open in the spring.

The trail stretched from Old Connecticut Path, past several commercial buildings, including the American Cancer Society and TJX's corporate offices, and extended to Rte. 30 and Speen Street across from Home Depot. Two signs FUTURE Cochituate Rail Trail www.CRTrail.org mark the trail's entrance.

This is a segment of the Cochituate Rail Trail, a 4-mile railroad right-of-way, which at one time connected Roxbury Carpet Company in Saxonville to the Boston-Albany main line in downtown Natick. As sections of that right-of-way become available, they are being converted into a trail for walking, biking, leisure and alternate transportation.

Charlene Frary, secretary and director for the Friends of Saxonville, whose organization is in partnership with the Framingham Cochituate Rail Trail Committee, said, "Before the trail is completed, several stumbling blocks have to be removed, including obtaining an MBTA easement, which is under way," said Frary.

On the trail, walkers stopped to enjoy a snapping turtle nest.

"The turtle probably came here where it is sandy to incubate the eggs in the sun," said A. Richard Miller of Natick, chairman of the Natick Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee.

The network of trails will connect Saxonville in Framingham to Natick Center. Its route will pass through Cochituate State Park and proposed side trails may connect to Natick Mall, Wayland's Cochituate Village and Framingham's Shoppers World. An eastern trail will link it to the Cochituate Dam, Snake Brook and the village of Cochituate, while a western trail is planned to follow a short portion of the old rail line and link it to the Natick Mall, the cinema complex and Shoppers World.

Walking the trail with his wife, Jill, a botanist, Miller added: "It's a path in the woods animals and people can enjoy. Everything non-motorized will be able to go on the trail including, bikes, baby carriages." Motorized wheel chairs will be allowed.

Anne Pratt, volunteer and member of the New England Wild Flower Society and Framingham resident, talked to the walkers and pointed out Staghorn sumac. Pratt was quick to point out it was not of the poison variety.

Walkers, joggers, bikers and commuters and those hoping for an escape are expected to use the multiple-use linear park.

"This is where I used to play as a kid," said Mara Yale from Framingham, founding chairwoman of the Framingham Cochituate Rail Trail Committee, who began searching the Web for an alternate route for commuting to work at The Mathworks Inc. in Natick when she discovered the trail.

Bill Clapper, who recently moved to Framingham with his wife, Alice, to be near his family, walked the trail. "It's a great effort," said Clapper. "I like the idea of volunteers doing something to maintain and make places available for adults, kids and grandkids," said Clapper. "It could become a commuter passageway to work and the mall and getting people off the road."

The Cochituate Rail Trail was part of a walking tour in Saxonville.

Richard Pruyn from Framingham has been exploring trails in the area for several years, seeking out recreational possibilities for biking, and very often, Rollerblading. "They provide a beautiful natural setting to go from point A to point B," said Pruyn.