

Natick Studies Land Buy for Rail Trail

By Claudia Torrens/ Daily News Staff

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NATICK -- Now that CSX is abandoning the right of way of train tracks in town, Natick is studying the possibility of buying it so some sections can become walking trails for the long-awaited Cochituate Rail Trail.

The portion of rail line in town is about 24 acres and starts in downtown Natick, ending in the Saxonville section of Framingham.

After CSX filed its intention of abandoning, town officials rushed to ask a federal board for a rail banking designation. Rail banking is a federal mechanism that allows rail corridors to be preserved as trails.

The town is asking for the trails to stay as one entity and not to be broken up so Natick can consider buying the right of way.

"To transform the area into walking trails would be of great value to the community," said Community Development Director Patrick Reffett. "This idea has been supported by the town for a long time."

The trail line starts in downtown Natick, crosses Rte. 9, goes to the end of Chrysler Road, behind Home Depot, crosses Rte. 30 and continues to Saxonville.

Reffett said the town is requesting the Federal Surface Transportation Board have 180 days to investigate things like the environmental conditions of the rail line or how could the town purchase the right of way.

Reffett said he did not know how much it could cost. He is responsible for exploring ways in which public funds could help the town make the purchase, he said.

Mel Albert, vice chairman of the Natick Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, said Natick is considering whether to use money from the Open Space Fund to buy the right of way.

"We are very pleased with the support of the town, with the Board of Selectmen and with Patrick Reffett," said Albert. "They know the big picture, they understand the benefits that this can bring to the town."

Reffett said the walking trails could be paved with asphalt so maintenance is less expensive.

The main branch of the Cochituate Rail Trail is a 4-mile railroad bed that used to go from northeast Framingham to downtown Natick. As sections of the right of way become available, they are turned into a trail for walkers and bikers.

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