

Framingham rail trail finding its way

By Dan McDonald/Daily News staff

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FRAMINGHAM — Mark Lamkin's dream is inching closer to a reality.

For years, Lamkin, as chairman of the Cochituate Rail Trail Committee, envisioned a four-mile jogging and cycling path connecting Saxonville and Natick Center.

Last week, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, which owns the rights to a Framingham strip of the path, reached a 99-year lease agreement in principle with the town. The agreement, which has the support of the Board of Selectmen, would open up the project to federal funding and allow it to move forward.

It comes at no cost to the town, which will be responsible for the maintenance of the path, said Gene Kennedy, the town's senior planner of community and economic development.

The town already has a permanent easement from the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority for one section of the trail. With the anticipated MBTA lease, the town would have the rights to the entire Framingham stretch.

Such an entitlement would offer more grant opportunities. Specifically, the town could now qualify for funding through the Federal Highway Administration's Transportation Enhancement program, said Lamkin.

Lamkin estimates the trail work will cost between \$750,000 and \$1 million per mile.

Now, the town will put design plans for the trail out to bid. The design will be paid for through grants, said Lamkin.

The town will be pursuing other grants for construction, said Lamkin.

The proposed trail runs along the now defunct Saxonville rail line, which was built in 1846 to provide transportation to the Lake Cochituate dam during its construction, according to the rail trail's Web site. It was also used by workers of the textile mills in Saxonville until 1973. Now that span of railroad joins the commuter line in Natick Center.

Lamkin hopes to open a portion of the trail for pedestrians in the future.

It will not be paved.

Lamkin thinks the path will offer a transportation alternative to driving. Once completed, the path will wind its way through residential and commercial districts.

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