

Cochituate Rail Trail design is ready

By Dan McDonald/Daily News staff

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FRAMINGHAM — Mark Lamkin has a vision for the four-mile strip of land on a defunct rail route from Saxonville to Natick Center.

Lamkin, chairman of the Cochituate Rail Trail Committee, sees the day when the trail bustles with activity.

After seven years, that day is still a ways off. Last week, the Saxonville end of the trail sat unused. Snowshoeing enthusiasts and cross country skiers had yet to touch the snow-covered corridor.

The nasty winter storm likely played a role, but a chain-link fence at the trail's School Street end, a half-mile from a bridge, would also have dissuaded any serious winter sportsmen from using that part of the path.

Technically, no one's supposed to use the trail yet.

Lamkin says it will be completed in two to three years. But several hurdles must still be cleared, including extensive engineering for the trail's design to determine subsurfaces, proper foundation grade, storm drainage and bridge repair, among other things.

That has yet to happen, but it appears Lamkin's committee has found the company for the job after meeting with design consultants Sampson & Weston.

Consulting work could cost between \$100,000 and \$200,000, Lamkin said.

Lamkin expects his committee to clear another obstacle this spring. While the town has had a permanent easement for a strip of the trail owned by the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, a stretch of the path is still owned by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority.

The town must agree to terms with the MBTA, but Lamkin expects his committee to go before Town Meeting with a proposal that would execute a lease for the remaining strip of land.

Some wrinkles still need to be ironed out. How the trail will end in Saxonville and what kind of road crossing, if any, will be installed in near the School Street/Concord Street intersection have yet to be determined.

When complete, the trail will be well worth the wait, said Ed Cross, a member of the town's Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee.

He said it will provide an pedestrian shortcut for many residents.

"It's definitely something that any town that has the opportunity to, should jump on," Cross said.

The committee will next meet with Sampson & Weston regarding the trail project's progress at 7 p.m., Feb. 9, at John Harvard's Brew House at Shoppers World.

(Dan McDonald can be reached at 508-626-4416 or dmcdonal@cnc.com.)