

Natick begins talks to buy land for rail trail

By Chris Bergeron/Daily News staff

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NATICK — Designs for the proposed bicycle and walking trail along a former rail line are taking shape, but the actual construction of the Cochituate Rail Trail will not start anytime soon.

Obstacles include purchasing the land from CSX Transportation, and coming up with the estimated \$3 million needed for construction.

Selectman Josh Ostroff, who also serves on the Cochituate Rail Trail Advisory Committee, said talks have started with the railroad company which owns the line that stretches from Natick Center to the area near Natick Collection.

"We've started discussions with CSX Transportation," Ostroff said. "All I would say about that is the town has to be patient and persistent."

The trail has a multi-million price tag, but Ostroff said the group will not push for using local tax dollars.

"Considering there are state and federal, and potentially private funds available, there aren't any plans to use local tax dollars," Ostroff said.

The group may look at using money from the town's Conservation Fund, which gets money from developers of projects in town, to cover some of the money needed to buy the land. In addition, the committee has \$450,000 remaining from the money that developers of the Natick Mall Expansion set aside for the rail trail.

The route of the trail takes it over some roads, including busy ones such as Rte. 30 and Speen Street.

People will be able to enter or exit the path at several locations. The proposed spots are: Cochituate State Park, Camp Arrowhead, the path from the Natick Collection, Navy Yard Field, Anniballi Park (Pegan Cove Park), the Commuter Rail Station and Natick Center.

Proposed areas to park cars include Chrysler Road, Mechanic Street, Natick Center, the American Veterans Post and existing businesses.

A draft conceptual design plan has been created, and the Advisory Committee recently held a public meeting where 50 people showed up. Town departments have also weighed in, Ostroff said, and the Advisory Committee will meet on Dec. 16 at 5 p.m. in Town Hall to put the final touches on the conceptual design plan.

One issue yet to be resolved is how to deal with the places where the trail crosses roads.

"One is Rte. 30, but also Lake (Street) and Washington (Avenue) and Kansas Street," Ostroff said. "All pose challenges to ensure the safety of trail users and motorists."

The connection between the trail and the MBTA train station should also be looked at, Ostroff said. He is concerned about how disabled people will be able to get from the trail to the station, as well as down to the platform. The station is in a trench in Natick Center, and currently does not have an elevator to allow people with disabilities to get to the platform.

The committee heard from people living next to the planned trail who worry about privacy and security of their homes, Ostroff said.

"Design of appropriate screening, plantings, fences, gates, etc. will be important to many people whose home and yard abuts the trail," Ostroff said.

The trail runs through an area where a species of special concern - the Eastern Pondmussel - lives. The project must be reviewed by the National Heritage and Endangered Species Program of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.

Also, the trail runs through wetland areas, so permits will likely be needed from the federal and state agencies, along with the Natick Conservation Commission.

"It's not so much difficult (to get approval), as that we have to do many different filings because the trail goes through or is adjacent to many wetland areas," Ostroff said.

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