COCHITUATE RAIL-TRAIL

FRAMINGHAM, MASSACHUSETTS

PRELIMINARY DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

MAY 2001

Prepared by Framingham Department of Planning and Economic Development

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Development of the Cochituate Rail-Trail (CRT) has been talked of for several years. The CRT is a proposed 3.8-mile long multi-purpose trail that would utilize a railroad right of way (ROW) known as the Saxonville Industrial Spur in the Towns of Framingham and Natick (see Figure 1 in Attachment A). It was hoped the Rail-Trail would connect Downtown Natick with the Route 9/Speen Street area, continue under the Massachusetts Turnpike to Framingham's Cochituate Brook Conservation Area, and end near the Sudbury River in Saxonville. However, the Natick portion of the railroad ROW is still used occasionally, so development of the Rail-Trail in that area is not likely to happen in the near future. This Rail-Trail development and management plan is for the Framingham portion of the CRT only.

1.1 Cochituate Rail-Trail Concept

CRT advocates envision turning two sections of abandoned railroad ROW, owned by Massachusetts Turnpike Authority (MTA) and the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA), into a 1.3-mile long linear park, which will include an off road biking/hiking path.

These two sections of railroad ROW will provide an off road link between the Route 9/Speen Street urban environment and the Cochituate Brook Conservation Area north of the MassPike. Framingham's Cochituate Brook Conservation Area is the location of existing and proposed hiking trails that will link several open space/passive recreational facilities including Cochituate State Park, Snake Brook Trail in Natick and Wayland, and Framingham's Reardon Park. From the Cochituate Brook Conservation Area the CRT will continue northwesterly along the right of way, cross Old Connecticut Path, cross over Cochituate Brook in two locations, cross School Street at Concord Street, and end at the Sudbury River in Saxonville.

At first the CRT will be an unpaved 10 to 12 feet wide trail that would be utilized by hikers and mountain bikers. The recreational facility will be developed in a manner where only very limited maintenance will be required. The CRT will be developed with grants and in-kind donations of material, labor, and services. Any assistance provided by Town departments will come from existing department budgets. No new appropriations will be required, unless the Town votes to widen and improve the CRT some time in the future.

1.2 Relationship to the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan

This trail development project is directly related to specific goals and objectives of the Framingham Open Space and Recreation Plan (1996), including:

- Add trails or increase public access to areas that can accommodate pedestrians
- Establish outdoor activities and organize nature walks for active senior citizens
- Create trails that are level and smooth without access barriers
- Create trails that can be used by the entire population rather than segregating those with special needs
- Provide visual access points or education centers for bird watching and viewing of wildlife in wetlands and other sensitive lands without disturbing the natural system
- Emphasize which programs are targeted for specific groups or have made special provisions for those with physical limitations due to disabilities or age.

All these goals will be at least partially fulfilled with development of the CRT. Another goal of the Open Space Plan is to evaluate the potential for creating a "rails to trails" system to make use of an existing linear path. The existing linear path mentioned in the Open Space Plan is the Saxonville Industrial Spur railroad ROW, the location of the proposed CRT.

1.3 Relationship to Other Greenways and Trails

The trail project outlined in this grant proposal is the first phase of a proposed multi-year greenway/trail system development project known as the Cochituate/Callahan State Park Greenway Project. The Greenway Project would be a system of linear parks, hiking trails, and bikeways/bike trails in the Town of Framingham that will eventually connect Cochituate and Callahan State Parks. In Framingham there are already sections of this trail system actively being used.

This greenway/ trail system will eventually link dozens of municipally owned parks, schools and conservation properties with other open space parcels owned by the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC), Massachusetts Water Resource Authority (MWRA), Sudbury Valley Trustees, and hopefully US Fish and Wildlife. Recreational, cultural, and open space resources to be linked include the recently completed Saxonville Nature Trail, the Saxonville Historic Walking Trail, the proposed Weston Aqueduct Trail System, the proposed Oxbow Trail System, the SuAsCo Wild and Scenic River, and historic Old Danforth Street Bridge. Framingham's Planning Department, Department of Environmental Management (DEM), and MWRA have begun discussions concerning the Weston Aqueduct and it's important role in this project. The greenway/trail system will eventually link the two State parks and the Bay Circuit Trail with several MetroWest communities (Framingham, Natick, Wayland, Sudbury, Marlborough, and Southborough). Continued expansion of this trail system to neighboring communities will link the system to the Wayside Trail, the Assabet River Rail Trail, the Bruce Freeman Rail-Trail, the South Sudbury Rail-Trail, and possibly the proposed Sudbury Aqueduct Trail and the Upper Charles Rail-Trail.

1.4 Benefits of Greenway and Trail Development

Development and use of the CRT will add a new dimension to the community. Area employees would be able to walk or jog along the Rail-Trail and connecting trails, and would greatly benefit from having this serene environment accessible to exercise and unwind at lunchtime, as well as before and after work. The trail system will be an enjoyable spot for families to hike and enjoy nature together.

Tourism opportunities can be enhanced through CRT development efforts. The trail could be promoted as a passive recreation/ tourist activity, around which existing servicing operations could benefit and new commercial opportunities generated.

This trail development project will increase awareness of Framingham's unique natural features, increase awareness of the Cochituate Brook Conservation Area and Reardon Park, and encourage area residents to become responsible stewards of the natural environment. The trail will be a place for children and adults to enjoy, observe, and learn about the natural environment.

As with the Saxonville Nature Trail, the CRT could eventually be used by the School Department to expand its environmental education curriculum with frequent outdoor trips. CRT's northern end is approximately 1,000 feet from Framingham High School's driveway on A Street. Along the CRT are opportunities to study riverway and wetland protection, biodiversity, and landscape interpretation. Development of the CRT will provide the Town of Framingham and the region with a safe area for outdoor enjoyment, and inspire support for preservation of the natural environment.

The CRT will make it easier for people to access places to exercise, and encourage people to enjoy the outdoor. Development of the CRT will expand transportation options for area residents by connecting residential and commercial areas with an off road hiking trail and bikeway, and provide a way for many residents to commute by bicycle. The CRT will enhance our urban environment, our community's character, and our resident's quality of life.

1.5 Scope of Plan

This document was written in order for the Town of Framingham to understand the CRT concept and issues enough to fully support the project. It is not a detailed engineering study or a document that can be used for contractor specifications. An attempt was made to merge long-term planning with an opportunistic action approach.

Section 2 is a description of the ROW, including an overview of: ownership; resources; development constraints; potential impacts from CRT development, and suggested mitigation measures. Section three is a discussion of various development and management issues, including: liability; safety; access easements; resource acquisition; maintenance; feasibility; and preliminary trail design. Section 4 describes preliminary CRT development, as well as potential future improvements.

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF MANAGEMENT AREA

The proposed CRT will utilize an abandoned railroad ROW know as the Saxonville Industrial Rail Spur. Rails have been removed, and there has been no rail traffic within the ROW for over ten years.

The ROW is within an urbanized area of Framingham, and parallels, abuts, or intersects with several heavily used roads, including Cochituate Road, Speen Street, Old Connecticut Path, School Street, and Concord Street. Given the area's urban setting, Planning Department staff were surprised by the somewhat secluded feeling one gets while walking within the ROW. Most of the ROW is heavily wooded

2.1 Location and Current Ownership

This document is a Plan for development of two portions of ROW. These sections are: 1.) the ROW from the Natick/Framingham line to the MassPike, owned by MTA; and 2.) the ROW north of the MassPike to Saxonville, owned by the MBTA.

2.1.1 South Section

The MTA owns a portion of the ROW located between the Natick/Framingham line and the Turnpike. MTA is in the process of selling its portion of the ROW; however, before selling the ROW the MTA has agreed to donate a free eighteen feet wide permanent easement to the Town of Framingham for development of the CRT.

The ROW is currently licensed to four adjacent property owners that utilize the property. Naturally, adjacent property owners interested in purchasing the property would like to be able to use as much of the property as possible. The Planning Department and MTA have coordinating with these adjacent property owners regarding where the easement should be located so as to be the least intrusive. A draft plan of the trail easement's location was distributed in November 1999 indicating one possible location for an eighteen feet wide permanent easement. The draft plan divides the ROW into five parcels, four of which would be auctioned off. The proposed easement location was designed with the intention of allocating the bike path fairly amongst each parcel while taking into consideration existing encroachments and the needs of the abutters.

Presently, MTA is surveying their section of ROW, and developing final plans for the easement's location. The eighteen feet wide easement will provide for a twelve feet wide trail surface and three feet wide buffers on each side for landscaping, signage, fencing, or guardrails as needed.

One of the adjacent property owners owns parcels both north and south of the ROW; this individual would like the CRT routed towards the north of the north parcel in order for the two parcels to be combined. The individual had a draft plan developed (see Figure 4 in Attachment A). The Planning Department and the Framingham Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee have reviewed the plan and find the proposed location acceptable, assuming the adjacent property owner assists with the trail development in this area. .

2.1.2 North Section

The MBTA owns the ROW north of the MassPike. Unlike the MTA portion of ROW, the Town would not be limited to a specific 18-feet wide easement to develop the CRT. There are no third party lease agreements, and the MBTA does not expect to sell the ROW in the near future. Planning Department personnel are pursuing permanent access of the ROW for use as the CRT. Rails and ties in this area were removed about eight or nine years ago.

2.2 Adjacent Properties

The ROW is adjacent to properties owned by approximately 21 individuals and private corporations. In addition, the ROW is adjacent to substantial amount of property owned by the MTA, and two Town-owned properties, Cochituate Brook Conservation Area, and a small wedge shaped parcel adjacent to the ROW's north end. Figure 2 in Attachment A provides the locations and owner's name of the adjacent properties. Most adjacent properties are commercial, industrial, or publicly owned. The ROW is adjacent to five single-family residential properties; only three are easily accessed from the proposed CRT location. A fence will be installed in this location to limit the public's access to the adjacent properties. At least one of the three adjacent property owners use the ROW to dispose of yard waste; this will need to stop and may create some inconvenience when this area of ROW is developed.

2.3 Site Survey

Planning Department personnel conducted several site visits to the ROW during the last ten months. It was obvious from the initial site visit that development of the rail-trail is possible, although a substantial amount of work will be required. In general, the ideal location for the CRT through the ROW is blocked in several locations by downed trees, piles of debris, and extremely thick vegetation. The rails have been removed from the ROW. Two railroad bridges over Cochituate Brook will require substantial work. Vegetation is very thick in two locations to a point where the ROW is nearly impassable: the southern 0.2-mile of the ROW owned by MTA; and the northern half of the MBTA section. Approximately half of the ROW can be easily developed into a trail/linear park. A portion of the ROW adjacent to the Cochituate Brook Conservation Area is already being used for hiking and nature study.

2.3.1 Methodology

The ROW has been divided into fourteen sections for planning and project management purposes. Attachment D contains site survey maps developed during initial site visits in July 2000, and photographs of the abandoned rail-road ROW. Each of the proposed CRT sections have been surveyed; development constraints, access issues, cultural resources, natural resources, and potential safety issues were identified, mapped, and assessed. The trail's fourteen sections each have their own unique issues, values, resources, and development constraints.

2.3.2 Site Survey and Resource Assessment

Section A: Framingham's portion of the proposed CRT, and the ROW's Section A, begin at Cochituate Road (Route 30) at the Natick/Framingham town line. Adjacent to the ROW to the north is a wall of large concrete blocks owned by Boston Sand and Gravel. Adjacent and south of Section A is a Gas Station and small office building. Vegetation in this portion of the ROW is extremely thick. Trash, grass clippings, and construction debris are scattered throughout the area. Trail development will be challenging in this section. The old railroad bed, which will be the location of the CRT, is lower than the surrounding areas. Drainage is a problem; standing water was noticed long after the last snow melted earlier this spring. Several years ago a monitoring well was installed by an adjacent property owner within Section A of the ROW. The individual presently leases, and is interested in purchasing this portion of the ROW. No sign of petroleum or other contaminants have been reported. There are no sidewalks on the west side of Cochituate Road. This is of concern; if Section A is developed for the CRT a sidewalk will be required in order to assure pedestrians can safely cross Cochituate Road to reach the Natick portion of the CRT or Cochituate State Park.

Section B: The southern half of Section B is similar to Section A; drainage is a concern but not as substantial, vegetation is not as thick, but substantial debris is scattered throughout the area. The northern half of Section B is clear of trash and debris, except for piles of grass clippings under the MassPike on-ramp #13. Adjacent to the ROW to the north is TJX's parking lot; to the south is Speen Street and a small parking area. The proposed CRT will go under the Mass Pike on-ramp west of TJX's driveway. This section of Rail-Trail will require minor landscaping and trail surface improvements. There is some graffiti under the exit ramp.

Section C: At the start of Section C is a MTA-owned fence blocking the ROW; a section of the fence will need to be removed and new fencing installed to limit access to the MassPike. Much of this Section is within or adjacent to a parking lot. An adjacent property owner who owns both north and south of the ROW wants to purchase the ROW in this area and has proposed an alternative route for the Rail-Trail (see Attachment A, Figure 4). If the CRT does not get routed to the north side of the adjacent property, it will go through the parking area; bollards, guardrails, signage, and crosswalks will be installed. Pedestrians and cyclists would need to stop for motor vehicles using the parking lot. This location will likely become a key lateral access area, and area businesses and employees will likely take an interest in the CRT's development. As soon as the Town takes over management of the ROW access restricting structures will need to be installed west of the parking lot. Both north and south of the ROW at the west end of Section C are wetlands and a small stream. A conduit was constructed under the rail bed to connect the two wetland areas. Another conduit was likely installed under the MassPike to connect these wetland areas with other water resources farther north.

Section D: This section begins near the conduit running under the abandoned rail bed, and ends just north of the MassPike at the Start of the MBTA-owned portion of ROW. In this area the proposed CRT is an existing dirt road, and if already used for hiking. The two wetland areas bordering Section C also border Section D. Substantial trash and construction debris are on the incline adjacent to the wetland south of the ROW in this area. The proposed CRT will pass under the MassPike in this Section. The Town's trail cleaning efforts will need to begin in this section of the ROW. The location is the site of frequent dumping, and graffiti under the MassPike is substantial. An adjacent path in this area leads to Cochituate Brook and related wetlands/marsh. This portion of Section D and the adjacent Framingham-owned Cochituate Brook Conservation Area is the site of a potential pocket park that would include benches and interpretive signage. In addition, individuals from the Cochituate State Park Advisory Committee have suggested constructing a bridge in this area or a short way up stream. The proposed bridge would connect the CRT with Snake Brook Trail and Cochituate State Park. Framingham Planning Department has decided not to pursue this bridge project because of the substantial wetlands issues and steep terrain. An alternate route farther west is for likely.

Section E: Section E is the start of the MBTA-0wned section of ROW. The proposed CRT is an existing dirt road in this section; electric power lines cross overhead. Cochituate Brook Conservation Area, including a large wetland area, is adjacent to and northeast of ROW in this area. Some trash and several tires were noticed in this section; however, little work is necessary to develop the CRT in this area. Where Sections E and F meet there is a drainage problem that will require work; at a minimum a crushed stone base is needed.

Section F: Section F is the location of much dumping, including many tires, old construction materials, a mattress, and yard waste. There are several downed trees blocking the ROW. Substantial debris is located on an incline south of the ROW; the area resembles a dump. Adjacent property owners will need to find another location for unwanted items. A connecting trail in this section leads to the Cochituate Brook Conservation Area and Reardon Park.

West of the downed trees the ROW has piles of construction debris, but overall is in good shape. This portion of Section F has several inches of 1-1½ inch stones on its surface, likely brought in because of drainage problems. Eventually a new trail surface will be constructed over the stone. Section F ends at Old Connecticut Path. This intersection will require proper design; in its present condition crossing the road at this location is unsafe. Traffic is heavy and fast.

Section G: Section G begins on the west edge of Old Connecticut Path. This is the location of the only remaining railroad track (partially buried in pavement). Vegetation is fairly heavy including briars. A wetland is adjacent to the ROW to the south.

Section H: Section H includes Bridge 1 and a few yards north and south of it. Vegetation near the bridge, especially north of it, is very thick. Cochituate Brook passes under the bridge. The bridge's wood timber decking is rotted and badly in need of replacement. The metal I-beams are rusted and have no paint remaining, assuming there was at one time. The structure will require a structural analysis to assure it is safe to reuse, however, it appears to be structurally sound. Reuse of the I-beams and stonework for a pedestrian bridge shouldn't be a problem; however, they may not be able to handle motor vehicles that would be used for maintenance.

Section I: Section I contains the thickest vegetation of all ROW sections. The ROW is nearly impassable. This section also contains several piles of railroad ties and other railroad remnants, and piles of yard waste dumped there by adjacent property owners. The yard waste can be run through a chipper. A fence in this area may be of benefit to both trail users and the adjacent property owners. Substantial wetland resources are adjacent to the west-southwest of the ROW. Erosion of the trail surface needs to be carefully watched; the CRT would pass only a few yards from the wetlands. A thorough habitat assessment will be accomplished before the trail is cleared in this section of ROW.

Section J: Section J includes Bridge 2 and a few yards north and south of it. Cochituate Brook passes under the bridge. Bridge 2's condition is in similar to Bridge 1's. The wood timbers are rotted and need to be replaced; the bridges' metal beams are severely rusted and have no paint remaining. The metal beams and supporting concrete/stone walls will require a structural analysis to assure they are safe to reuse for new bridge decking. The ROW just north of Bridge 2 is the ideal location for a small pocket park. Wetland resources and Cochituate Brook are east of the ROW in this area. A large office building and parking area is to the west-southwest of the bridge.

Section K: This section has fairly thick vegetation and downed trees block the location of the proposed CRT. Last year contractors reconstructing an adjacent parking area pushed a pile of gravel into the ROW. Section K also has a few locations with trash.

Section L: Section L is very similar to this Section K; but vegetation is somewhat heavier, and there appears to be less trash.

Section M: Section M has extremely thick vegetation and is blocked by downed trees. There is trash in several locations. The area is impacted by adjacent property owners who are utilizing portions of the ROW for parking trucks. Section M ends and the proposed CRT exists the heavily wooded ROW at School Street, near the corner of Concord Street.

Section N: Section N begins at School Street. North of School Street the ROW parallels Concord Street and ends at the Sudbury River. The Town of Framingham owns a small wedge shaped parcel adjacent to Section N. Most of this section has been used by an adjacent property owner for parking; both the MBTA ROW and the Town owned property are covered by asphalt. In addition, the adjacent property owner has fenced off portions of the ROW and Town

owned property. The fencing will be removed and some new fencing will be installed along the actual property line. The existing parking lot will be developed into a small pocket park. Much of the asphalt will be removed. The pocket park will include several parking spaces, park benches, bike racks, fencing, and appropriate landscaping.

2.4 Potential Impacts, Suggested Mitigation, and Other Environmental Issues

A preliminary assessment of potential environmental impacts that could occur from the project has already been completed. The railroad right-of-way is adjacent to several wetland areas and crosses Cochituate Brook in two places. Two railroad bridges will need to be reconstructed, and the trail will be cleared through thickly vegetated areas. The Conservation Commission will appoint a member to work on CRT issues during its May 16th, 2001 meeting. Their representative will work with Planning Department personnel to assess potential impacts, develop mitigation measures, and assure the Commission's concerns are properly addressed.

The resources within the trail right-of-way will be managed to provide a healthy diversity of native woodland and wetland communities for wildlife habitat, and for the appreciation of trail users and adjoining landowners.

2.4.1 Drainage and Erosion Issues

The ROW at present has several areas where drainage needs to be addressed during trail planning and construction. In two areas of the proposed CRT (Section A and a portion of Section E) trail surface will need to be supported by a crushed stone and compacted gravel base. Installation of piping under the raised trail surface will be required to prevent pooling of water.

Presently there are no obvious erosion problems along the ROW, however, there are several areas where erosion of soil from trail development and use could become a problem. Soil erosion needs to be carefully watched in two areas (Section D, and throughout Sections G, H, I, J, and the southern half of K). Planting and management of native grasses, wildflowers, trees and shrubs, and use of soil stabilizers will be necessary in these areas. Proper use of staked hay bales and silt fencing will be required during grading activities within much of the ROW (See Attachment I).

2.4.2 Potential Contaminated Soils

The Planning Department has not observed areas with obvious soil contamination during previous site visits. Because the ROW was used as a railroad there likely are several areas where underlying soils have been contaminated. According to the Department of Environmental Protection there are no known hazardous substances within the ROW (see Attachment H).

2.4.3 Biological Resources

The CRT will be developed adjacent to several wetland resources. These areas are prime wildlife habitat and contain a significant numbers of wildlife species. Protection of this wildlife habitat is a important issue to consider while planning and developing the CRT. A thorough assessment of Section I will be conducted before the CRT is developed in that area. Vegetation is extremely thick in this section, and the CRT would be located within a few yards of a wetland area, which is a likely native wildlife nursery site. Knowing what species utilize the ROW is important for management and resource protection purposes.

2.4.4 Cultural Resources

To the Planning Department's knowledge there are no significant archaeological, cultural, or historical resources within the ROW. However, it is possible the two old railroad bridges could

eventually be listed in the Town of Framingham's or the State's inventory of Historic and Archaeological Assets of the Commonwealth. In addition, items of archaeological interest may be uncovered during the CRT development project.

3.0 MANAGEMENT ISSUES

3.1 Access Easements

During the summer of 1999 the Planning Department was contacted by the MTA concerning their portion of the ROW. The MTA offered, prior to selling off their land, to grant a permanent public access easement to Framingham in order to build the CRT.

This ROW was originally purchased by MTA when the creation of a new multi-modal transportation center at the Trailways Bus Terminal on Speen Street in Natick was being discussed. Since Home Depot now occupies this property, the MTA desires to sell the land.

MTA is hoping to sell the ROW to adjacent property owners after granting a permanent easement to the Town. The ROW is currently licensed to four adjacent property owners that utilize the property. Naturally, adjacent property owners interested in purchasing the property would like to be able to use as much of the property as possible. The Planning Department and MTA have coordinating with these adjacent property owners regarding where the easement should be located so as to be the least intrusive.

The proposed easement location has been designed with the intention of allocating the bike path fairly amongst each of five parcels while taking into consideration existing encroachments and the needs of the abutters. The easement is expected to be given to Framingham during the next couple months.

A vote by MBTA Board of Directors on June 15, 2000 authorized its Realty Division to "develop and implement a formal policy that would make certain abandoned and/or surplus rights-of-way available to local cities and towns for use a multi-use trails". Since that time the Planning Department has been in communication with MBTA personnel and is hopeful that a permanent easement will be soon given to the Town for the MBTA-owned portion of the ROW.

In August 2000 MBTA received a letter from a contingency of legislators from the Framingham and Natick area regarding use of the MBTA-owned portion of right-of-way for development of the proposed CRT. The letter requested a long-term lease of the ROW; in addition, an interim arrangement for temporary use of the ROW for a trail was requested.

Because permanent access to both the Turnpike Authority and MBTA portions of the ROW have not been formally granted to the Town, temporary access easements are necessary. The Planning Department communicated the need for temporary access to each authority: the MBTA has given the Town a temporary access permit for the workday scheduled for May 12th, MTA is expected to grant temporary access by May 11th.

3.2 Feasibility

During recent site visits Planning Department personnel have hiked the ROW from the Natick/Framingham border to the Sudbury River. Development of the CRT in Framingham as a linear park, and as a transportation alternative is feasible. Central Transportation Planning Staff completed a Reconnaissance Study of the Saxonville Branch Right-of-Way in January 2000 (Attachment H). The Study has shown that development of the Framingham portion of the ROW can be developed for recreational purposes. Overall, the development of CRT is a very doable project, which will require effort on the part of the Town and its partners. The quality of the recreational and transportation resource developed is totally dependant upon how much effort, funding, and other resources that State agencies, nonprofit organizations, the Town, local residents, and business partners expend. At a minimum the CRT will be a ten to twelve feet wide trail that can be used for hiking, mountain biking and cross country skiing. Or if the

Town chooses, the ROW can be developed into a 1.3-mile landscaped linear park with a quality 12-feet wide bikeway surface, park benches, and interpretive signage.

3.3 Liability

Upon accepting either a temporary or permanent easement for use of the ROW for a trail, the Town will be liable for injuries occurring on the property, much the same way it is with other recreational facilities.

The Town will utilize contractors to complete the majority of work in certain areas containing potential hazards. During organized workdays, volunteers will not be allowed to use power equipment for liability reasons. In addition, each volunteer will sign a sheet stating they will not hold the Town, MBTA, or the Turnpike Authority liable for injuries that may occur.

3.4 Safety

Safety of trail users is a primary concern. The Planning Department recommends the Town establish policies for trail use and design and construct the CRT with safety in mind. The location of the CRT has very few locations where it comes in contact with motor vehicle intersections. Securing these entrances with access restricting structures will partially eliminate one major safety concern: pedestrians and cyclists coming in contact with motor vehicles. Proper intersection design at several locations is also necessary.

If the trail surface is eventually paved, upstream signalization/signage should be installed in order to give fast cyclists and skaters time to slow down safely. Also, a wide trail surface is required if the CRT gets heavy use. Given the ROW is flat, straight, and wide enough for a quality trail surface, injuries to high-speed cyclists will be minimal.

If the CRT becomes a heavily utilized facility, security patrols may be warranted.

Recommended policies include:

- The CRT will be only open for use from dawn to dusk
- Travel at a reasonable speed
- Fast traffic (e.g., cyclists) always yields to slower traffic (e.g., pedestrians).
- Please keep right except to pass
- Pass on left after giving an audible signal
- Obey the laws of the road; stop at all Stop signs
- Keep pets on short leash
- Wear protective headgear.
- Respect private property adjacent to the trail
- No hunting, littering, fires, alcoholic beverages.

3.5 Allowed Trail Uses

The CRT will be used primarily for mountain bicycling, walking, running, dog walking (leashed only) and nature observation during warm weather. If the trail surface is paved scating and bicycling for transportation are likely to become popular. Similar rail-trails have been proven to be significant generators of bicycle use. During winter months the trail will continue to be open for non-motorized recreational uses (walking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing). Motorized vehicles including motorcycles, mopeds, motorized scooters, snowmobiles, and all-terrain vehicies (ATVs) will not be allowed.

3.6 Partnerships

To successfully develop the CRT in a cost effective manner and within a reasonably short amount of time, a partnership of individuals and organizations will be required. The Framingham Planning Department has begun to develop this partnership, but additional efforts are necessary. This partnership will hopefully consist of a coalition of public and private organizations and individuals, including:

- Framingham Planning Department
- Framingham Parks and Recreation Department
- Framingham Department of Public Works
- Framingham Conservation Commission
- Framingham Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (FBPAC)
- Saxonville Nature Trail Committee members
- Oaks Neighborhood Association
- Friend's of Saxonville
- Natick Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee
- Cochituate State Park Advisory Committee
- Rails-to-Trails Conservency
- Representatives from area businesses, and
- Area residents.

Area businesses that will hopefully partner in the trail development include

- REI
- Computer World
- MathWorks
- TJX

In addition, several other public entities may be willing to assist with this project, including

- Middlesex Sherrif Department
- MTA Maintenance Division
- Department of Environmental Management
- MBTA

3.7 Trail Committee

To further develop and coordinate the above-mentioned partnership an CRT Development Advisory Committee needs to be formed.

This Committee should consist of representatives from various organizations and individuals with an interest in the CRT's development; hopefully many will have previous experience with similar community projects. Representatives from the following entities should form the majority of the committee:

- Framingham Planning Department
- Framingham Parks and Recreation Department
- Framingham Department of Public Works
- Framingham Police Department
- Framingham Conservation Commission
- Framingham Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (FBPAC)

- Oaks Neighborhood Association
- Friend's of Saxonville

Additional members will be individuals that have experience with similar projects, are adjacent property owners, or represent specific businesses committed to the CRT's success. The Planning Department will staff the committee as needed during the planning and initial development stages.

Two members of the FBPAC have been assisting the Planning Department with CRT planning, and would be FBPAC's representatives if the Board of Selectmen formally establishes a Trail Development Advisory Committee.

On May 16th the Conservation Commission will appoint one member to work with the Planning Department on environmental issues, and would be the Commission's representative to the Trail Development Advisory Committee.

The Committee will help resolve management concerns in the planning process, and to identify areas where additional research may be needed. The Trail Development Advisory Committee would be responsible for coordinating potential resources, organizing workdays, and measure their progress.

Once Phase I of the trail development project is nearing completion the committee should be restructured and the focus of the committee's responsibilities would change to long-term management issues. At that time it may not be necessary for DPW, Park and Recreation, Conservation Commission, and Planning Department to have representatives on the Committee. The CRT Management Committee will hold regular meetings. In addition to project management and long-range management and maintenance, the CRT Management Committee will seek additional funding and assistance from various public and private entities.

This new CRT Management Committee will continually communicate with the Planning Department to keep them informed of any issues pertaining to the Rail-Trail project. The Planning Department will assist the CRT Management Committee if necessary, but will focus on grant administration and development of additional grant proposals. Ultimately, the CRT Management Committee will be responsible for the project's successful implementation.

3.8 Resource Acquisition

The Planning Department has attempted to put together a Plan that will not require large sums of funding. To accomplish this, resources need to be acquired from a wide range of sources. The CRT will be developed with grants and in-kind donations of material, labor, and services. The majority of funding will come through State grant programs. Volunteer hours worked are expected to total several thousand hours during the next two years. Donations of materials and services are expected from local businesses and individuals. Any assistance provided by Town departments will come from existing department budgets. The Town's departments will assist in a relatively small way. For instance, the Park and Recreation Department has agreed to assist in small ways when needed, assuming they has the manpower to do so. DPW will be asked to work on several small roadway and sidewalk enhancements; they will be spread out over the next 18 to 24 months. Additional organizations will also be approached for assistance.

3.8.1 Grants

The CRT is the type of project many public entities like to support. The project's recreation, transportation, pedestrian, bikeway, and local/regional/state partnership components are especially appealing to today's State grant proposal review processes.

Several individuals from DEM have expressed their support for CRT development project including, DEM's Commissioner and Cochituate State Park's Superintendent. The Town of Framingham has been awarded a $20,000 grant for development of the CRT from the Recreational Trails Grant Program administered by DEM. Once Selectmen give the go ahead to develop the CRT, the $20,000 DEM grant will be expended on materials and services. A $20,000 local match is required, which can be, and will be in the for of in-kind donations of time, materials, and services.

The Planning Department has applied for funding through the MassPike FY01 Tourism Grant Program. Additional grant proposals will be written later in the year as needed. Federal TEA-21 funding will be sought if the Town decides to pave the trail surface.

3.8.2 In Kind Donations

Volunteers will play a huge part in the CRT's development. Three workdays have already been planned (May 12th, June 2nd, and July 14th), and several more will likely occur before winter. At present there are several dozen individuals from all walks of life anxious to begin trash removal and trail clearing. Dozens more will likely volunteer during the summer. A variety of alternative labor forces can be, and will be, utilized to successfully construct the CRT.

Public and vocational schools, scouting troops, and 4-H clubs provide continuing contributions to greenway development and trail maintenance by introducing youth from a variety of socio-economic groups to local history, environmental issues, public relations, and design challenges in an outside classroom setting. Hopefully the Framingham School Department, Keefe Tech, and local scout groups will step forward soon to assist with the trail development project.

The Student Conservation Association's Massachusetts Forests and Parks AmeriCorps program will be contacted for assistance during next fiscal year.

Middlesex Sheriff's Office will be soon contacted to begin clearing brush/downed trees and removing graffiti. They will provide at least a couple weeks of free labor; the Town is required to feed the inmates well, and provide them with the required tools and materials.

Local businesses can be a tremendous help during and after the CRT is developed. Assistance could come in the following ways:

- Donation of funds or materials for bridge construction, and for purchase and installation of signage, benches, fencing, guardrails, paving materials, bike racks, and bollards
- Allow the use of adjacent properties to store materials while the CRT is being constructed
- Organize a company-wide trail development workday
- Provide food and drink to volunteers
- Provide equipment when needed, including trucks and tools
- Develop flyers, brochures, maps, and signs
- Contact other local businesses in the area that may want to assist with the trail's development
- Adopt a section of the trail to develop, and or to maintain after it has been constructed.

3.9 Public Outreach

There is tremendous power in our community's people, resources, knowledge and ideas. But often, not all community interests are represented in planning recreation facilities. Whenever possible the Town should and incorporate all voices in the planning process, and the

Management Committee will be in a place to do so. I order to develop greater public knowledge and appreciation for the CRT and gain broad-based support, the Planning Department suggests the committee consider some of the following potential activities:

- Dedication day and official introduction to the community
- Develop a suitable program of events (including field days and displays) to highlight the CRT, and potential management problems, or
- Campaign to attract private/corporate donations.

3.10 Rail-Trail Design

CRT will be developed in a manner where very limited maintenance will be required. There will be no grass to mow; instead the area adjacent to the trail surface will be either mulch or native vegetation. At first the trail surface will be the equivalent to a dirt road (uneven and unpaved surface). Some drainage improvements will be constructed during this summer. During the second year of trail development much of the trail surface will be graded and stone dust or similar material will be used to smooth the surface. Eventually the Town may decide to pave the trail surface.

AASHTO Guide recommends a minimum paved width of 10 feet (3.0 meters [m]) for a two-way shared use path. Where substantial use by bicyclists, joggers, skaters, and pedestrians is expected, large maintenance vehicles are likely to be used, or steep grades are encountered, it is desirable and may be necessary to increase the width of paved surface to 12 feet (3.6 m) or even 14 feet (4.2 m). If the Town decides to pave the CRT, the Planning Department recommends a 12 feet wide paved trail surface.

The AASHTO Guide also recommends that a graded area 3 feet (0.9 m) or wider be maintained adjacent to both sides of the pavement to provide clearance from trees, poles, walls, fences, guardrails, or other lateral obstructions. In no cases should there be less than two feet clearance on either side of the trail surface.

Where the path is adjacent to ditches, streams, or slopes steeper than 1:3, a separation greater than 3 feet (0.9 m) should be considered. In addition, a physical barrier such as shrubbery, railing, or chain link fence may be needed depending on the depth of drop-off and condition at the bottom.

The largest concern for proper CRT design is where it will come in contact with automobiles. The CRT will intersect with the following roads: Cochituate Road, Old Connecticut Path, and School Street. At each location proper intersection design is extremely important. A preliminary design for the intersection with Old Connecticut Path is included in Attachment B. The Old Connecticut Path intersection is by far the most significant traffic related problem within the CRT. Traffic volume is heavy and relatively fast, and there are presently no cross walks, traffic signals, or signage, appropriate for a trail crossing. Additional intersection concepts are included in Attachment I.

The CRT will be developed in a manner where automobiles cannot turn off a road and enter the trail area. Access will be controlled with signage, bollards or other access restricting structures. Removable bollards will be used in several locations to restrict vehicles from accessing the ROW, but allow maintenance workers to unlock and remove the bollards when necessary. All bollards (removable or not) will be have reflective paint, and other efforts will be made to make them more visible, including painting yellow stripes on adjacent pavement. See Attachment B for suggested bollard designs, and pavement striping.

3.11 Long Term Rail-Trail Management and Maintenance

The energy and enthusiasm that drives construction of projects can block the discussion of long-term maintenance and management issues. The CRT Management Committee will be responsible for working out these issues in advance, and if necessary developing a long-term management and maintenance plan. There may be a need for an on-going process of revising the management plan.

The most important maintenance issues for the CRT are brush clearing and trimming of tree limbs, and litter removal. After a few years if trimming is not done and litter accumulates the trail may fall into disrepair. Other concerns and issues needing occasional attention include signage maintenance, erosion, domestic pet control, graffiti, vandalism, and dumping. The best defense toward preventing this is active maintenance and monitoring by volunteers. CRT Management Committee may decide to develop an 'Adopt-a-Trail' Program, providing low-cost (possibly free) long-term maintenance.

Maintaining trails with limited funds is a challenge for all trail managers. Each year the Park and Recreation Department will be asked to provide a crew to assist with limited trail maintenance. If Park and Recreation does not have a crew available in the foreseeable future, a similar crew would be sought through the DPW or the Middlesex County Sheriff's Department. The crew will be asked to cut back brush and tree limbs. If a crew is utilized on an average of one day per year, the vegetation will not become problematic. Small tree limbs and other vegetation can be run through a chipper and left as mulch on the side of the trail. The mulch will keep down vegetation growth within the three foot buffer area on each side of the trail, as well as enrich the soil.

This low maintenance approach is possible by doing the following: making the CRT a regular location to be cleaned on Green Up Day each year; locating a group like the Friends of Saxonville, the Oak Neighborhood Association, or similar entity organize an additional workday once a year; and having a CRT Management Committee (or other responsible entity like the Friends of Saxonville) keep an eye out for dumping, vandalism, graffiti, erosion and other potentially troubling issues.

As the number of trail users increase, maintenance needs will also increase. In future years, the Town may want to intensify maintenance of the CRT, especially the trail's surface, if funding for maintenance is secured at Town Meeting. Reshaping and compacting of the surface periodically will maintain the condition of the surface.

4.0 RAIL-TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

The primary goal of this project is development of a Rail-Trail from the Framingham/Natick line to the end of the ROW in Saxonville. To begin with the trail will not be paved (except were it already exists), and will be roughly ten feet wide to begin with. Improvements will be made to the existing railroad bridges, and motorized vehicle access restricting structures will be installed. Automobile access barriers will include trees, earthen berms, stones or stonewalls, fencing, and removable bollards as individual locations require. Where necessary, additional improvements will be constructed/installed including signage, fencing, guardrails, and pavement striping. The project will provide appropriate public access for walking, jogging, cross-country skiing, and nature study in a way that minimizes any adverse impacts to natural resources or adjacent properties. Additional improvements will be made to the CRT at a later date, including additional landscape and access improvements, and widening and improving the trail with an appropriate material that would allow the ROW to be used as a transportation corridor. In addition, plans call for development of three pocket parks along the CRT, including one just north of the MassPike, one north of Bridge 2, and one at the ROW's north end at the Sudbury River.

4.1 Phase I

Phase I of the CRT development project will begin with a substantial amount of cleaning and removal of trash and debris and brush clearing. Early on the focus of work will be from the MassPike north to the Old Connecticut Path, the southern most 0.25-mile of the MBTA-owned ROW, and under the MassPike and 0.25 mile south on the Turnpike Authority owned portion of the ROW. The next area cleaned and cleared would be the northern most 0.3-mile of the ROW just south of the Sudbury River.

Until the Trail Development Advisory Committee is established and has taken over the CRT's development, Planning Department personnel will assist with coordinating volunteer efforts and assure the scheduled workdays go well.

The central portion (approximately 0.3 mile) of the MBTA-owned portion of ROW will not be worked on until the Town or other public entity receives a permanent or long-term access easement. Individuals organizing and managing workdays will assure volunteers stay away from areas considered problems, especially the two old railroad bridges that cross over Cochituate Brook. Contractors will be utilized on this section of trail because of potential liability issues.

The CRT will be developed and opened to the public one section at a time. As quickly as possible several trail sections will be opened to provide access for bicyclists and individuals in wheelchairs, although it will not be possible to open the whole ROW to wheelchairs the first year.

The Trail Committee, with the assistance of Planning Department personnel, will coordinate in kind donations of services and materials. In addition, the Planning Department will award several small contracts for landscaping, heavy equipment operations, carpentry, painting, fence repair and installation, and the purchase of signs, bollards, and graffiti removal materials.

By mid-summer the main focus will be the ROW's two bridges; the old bridge decks will be removed, the supporting I-beams will be cleaned and painted, new decks will be constructed, and railings will be installed. In addition, some signage and access restricting structures will be installed.

4.2 Phase II

Phase II will include landscape and access improvements, improving the trail surface, development of three pocket parks, and installation or construction of additional enhancements. Most importantly is improving handicapped access in all areas by assuring the trail surface is stabilized, sections of sidewalks are reconstructed, and drainage improvements are constructed where necessary.

4.3 Potential For Additional Improvements

The most significant improvement that could be constructed would be paving the trail surface. Additional possibilities include:

- § Widen the trail surface to 14-feet wide where possible
- § Murals, sculpture and other forms of public art can make the CRT unique and open up new possibilities for promoting additional trails and bringing in new partners.
- § Additional trail loops can be developed creating the option for people to enjoy a larger open space.
- § Improve access to Snake Brook Trail and Lake Cochituate
- § Develop a trail north of the CRT along Saxonville's flood levee that will end at the Danforth Street Bridge and the Saxonville Nature Trail
- § Stripe the trail surface with recommended lanes for faster, slower and novice skaters, cyclists and joggers.

4.4 Preliminary Project Budget

Phases I and II as described in this Plan are expected to cost approximately $150,000 in funding and in-kind donations of labor, materials and services. It is the hope of the Planning Department that the project can be completed without a Town Meeting appropriation of any amount. The option of paving the Trail surface could cost as much as $400,000 or $500,000.

A list of major project components and approximate costs are included in Attachment C.

4.5 Preliminary Project Schedule

The CRT development project will begin on May 12, 2001. Approximately half of the CRT will be open to the public by October 1, 2001. The whole CRT will be open to the public by early summer of 2002. Phases I and II are scheduled to be completed by October 1, 2002.