

A community newsletter from the Natick Cochituate Rail Trail Advisory Committee on the proposed Cochituate Rail Trail. Visit our website at www.natickma.gov/crt

Welcome to the 2009 Natick CRT Update!

The Natick Cochituate Rail Trail Advisory Committee is appointed by the Selectmen, and advises the town about a potential rail trail project.

Our 11 members include four citizens at large, along with representatives of the Selectmen, Planning Board, Recreation and Parks Commission, Conservation Commission, Finance Committee, Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee and the Community Development Department. Members serve for three-year terms.

Committee meeting are public, and are posted in Town Hall and on the Town's web site. ■■■

What is the Cochituate Rail Trail?

The CRT is a proposed 4-mile multi-use path and linear park connecting Natick Center with Saxonville, including a spur to the Natick Collection. The CRT would run over the former Saxonville Branch Railroad, abandoned as a freight line in 2006.

The CRT connects to or crosses Lake Cochituate and Cochituate State Park, several major roads, an MBTA commuter rail station, existing neighborhoods, current and planned residential development, Camp Arrowhead and the Amvets, several major employers (including Boston Scientific and the U.S. Soldier Systems Center), and the Natick Collection, New England's largest shopping mall.

Initial funding for the CRT has come from "mitigation funds" earmarked for this project by the developers of the Natick Collection.

The CRT is a long-term public project that will include acquisition of the land, design, construction and maintenance. No local tax dollars have been proposed for the project; many similar trails rely successfully on volunteers and public/private partnerships for maintenance.

Other completed or planned rail trail projects include the Cape Cod Rail Trail (Dennis to Wellfleet), the Shining Sea Trail in Falmouth, the

Minuteman Bikeway (Bedford to Cambridge), the Milford Upper Charles Trail, and the Bruce Freeman Trail (Lowell to Framingham). The CRT web page at www.natickma.gov/crt includes a map of current and planned rail trails across the state.

We encourage you to explore these trails, and take note of features that you like (or don't like) in order to provide input into the CRT design. ■■■

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Conceptual Design process gets on track

A Conceptual Design study gets underway this fall. The Town has hired the engineering firm of Fay, Spofford and Thorndike for this initial design phase. FST will work with the Advisory Committee to identify and develop a plan to address many issues:

- Neighborhood concerns
- Dimensions and trail surface
- Access, parking and transit connections
- Grade crossings and bridges
- Signage, safety and security
- Integration with Framingham section
- Environmental and habitat issues
- Drainage conditions
- Landscape architecture
- Cochituate State Park and more open space
- Recognition of Natick history
- Incorporation of Public art
- Costs and funding

A public meeting will be held on Monday evening, November 23 at 7PM at the Morse Library to provide expert recommendations, take input and answer questions. The end result of this process

will be a conceptual design study for the Natick section, which helps make the project eligible for state, federal and grant funding.

The FST design contract was funded by mitigation funds earmarked for this project.

Your comments, concerns and questions are welcome through this initial design process, whether the trail passes by your back yard, near your workplace or is miles away. The CRT Advisory Committee will work with FST to ensure that all voices are heard.

Please think about what features would make the CRT most useful to you, your family and the community, and plan to attend the 11/23 meeting to learn more and share your ideas. ■■■

Update on CSX Negotiations

Natick has just begun negotiations with the owner of the right of way, CSX Transportation. The negotiation process may take some time, and acquisition may require outside funding. Natick works with other communities that have successfully negotiated with CSX for similar corridors. An extensive environmental testing process will be part of the negotiation process.

An initial environmental assessment conducted for the Town has indicated that the right-of-way is suitable for a rail trail, but given the history of industrial use of some properties along the ROW, we anticipate the need for testing and cleanup.

Other communities that have negotiated with CSX have reported that the process is slow. Every 180 days, Natick and CSX may renew a 'railbanking' agreement through the Federal government that allows for exclusive negotiations between the two parties. ■■■

Framingham CRT News

The ROW that may become the CRT extends from Natick Center to Framingham's Saxonville neighborhood, about 4 miles in total.

Since the beginning of 2009, Framingham has been working with its design consultants, Weston & Sampson on a 25% design for the Framingham section. At the same time, Weston & Sampson has been coordinating the trail design with the design for a sewer improvement project currently in process that will be placed under the CRT.

In addition to regular committee meetings, an introductory meeting for the public was held in February and the first public workshop was held in July. The design was very positively received and is being reviewed by town departments.

This spring, a 99-year lease was executed with the MBTA. This lease, combined with a previously-executed easement agreement with the MassPike, gives Framingham access to its entire section of the CRT.

The Framingham committee received a second grant from REI, and more donations from local businesses.

The web site www.crtrail.org has more information about the Framingham section of the project. ■■■

What's the status of the Rail Trail today?

The ROW is private property. To curtail dumping and unsafe access by motor vehicles, the Town has installed gates and granite blocks, and worked with CSX to close off the bridge across Route 9.

The Town of Natick does not have authority or control over the right of way, but has taken these steps and notified CSX to protect public safety. Unless converted to uses such as rail trails, abandoned railway corridors are often magnets for dumping, and the safety of residents is a priority.

If you observe dumping or other illegal activity on the ROW, please report it to the Natick Police. ■■■

Contact the CRT Advisory Committee

The CRT Advisory Committee holds public meetings about once a month. Visit www.natickma.gov/crt for more information, or email crt@natickma.org, or call the Selectmen's office at (508) 647-6410.

The CRT Advisory Committee web page includes

- CRT reports
- Maps
- Frequently Asked Questions & Answers
- Meeting minutes
- Links to other projects and resources
- Committee directory
- Contact information

Please visit the web page for regular updates! ■■■
