

Cochituate Rail Trail Advisory Committee 2017 Annual Report

Committee members at the end of 2017 are:

David Camacho, Vice-Chair
Barb Coco
Richard LeBlanc, Recreation & Parks Commission Representative
Jamie Errickson, Director of Community & Economic Development
Janice Henderson, Clerk
Peter Henry
Robert Mueller
Joshua Ostroff, Chair, Board of Selectmen Representative
William Schoenig

Design

2017 brought significant progress for the Cochituate Rail Trail project, following the Town's acquisition of the former CSX Saxonville Branch and Wonderbread Spur rights-of-way in late 2016.

The year began with a 25% Design Public Hearing held by MassDOT on January 11 at the Wilson Middle School, for which many comments were received and considered. This resulted in alterations to the project design, principally a longer bridge across Route 9, which will allow for safer sidewalks and travel lanes on that state roadway.

Additional public input was received through meetings and visits with abutters to the project, which helped to inform changes to the projects landscaping and barriers to adjoining property such as Lake Cochituate State Park, AMVETS Post 79, Camp Arrowhead, which is leased to the Town by the Department of Conservation and Recreation, along with abutting private property. The committee also heard from supporters of boating on Lake Cochituate, with a request that the construction process ensure the integrity of the stone arch tunnel connecting the lake's South and Middle ponds. Requested alterations to the tunnel, or a replacement structure, were proposed but are outside of the CRT Advisory Committee's scope.

A 75% design was submitted to MassDOT in November, to be reviewed by MassDOT, the Town, and DCR, as well as the Conservation Commission and the Planning Board. The design for the CRT was amended to complement a new multi-use park at the adjoining Navy Yard Field on Washington Avenue, and to allow for various private connections, such as a proposed spur to be constructed by MathWorks to their new Lakeside campus.

Construction

The project is on schedule for final design in early 2018, with advertising for construction in mid-2018. Construction would follow starting in late 2018 or early 2019. The Route 9 bridge design change contributed to a revised construction budget of approximately \$10 million, which was approved in mid-year by the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization, or MPO. The cost may change again as design is finalized. Construction will be funded by a combination of federal and state funds.

Interim Use

In late 2016, the Selectmen approved interim use of the newly acquired right-of-way. In 2017, most of the CRT was opened to the public for daylight use. Most significantly, the Route 9 bridge, historically known as the Willow Bridge, was improved to allow safe passage prior to its replacement as part of CRT construction. Bridge upgrades were overseen by the Town's Department of Public Works, and deck repairs were made through generously donated efforts of the New England Regional Council of Carpenters.

Fundraising

The Town executed a fundraising agreement with the Friends of Natick Trails, a local non-profit, to offer sponsorship opportunities that will help offset the Town's land acquisition costs, and contribute to future trail upkeep and other open space needs. In Spring 2017, Natick Town Meeting supported a petition requesting state legislation that will allow the Town to offer sponsorship naming rights for the new bridges across Route 9 and Route 30, the latter in cooperation with Framingham. This bill is pending action. The Friends also conducted other activities, including trail cleanup.

Looking ahead

In 2018, the project design will be finalized, with review by Town and state agencies; construction will be advertised and a bid awarded by MassDOT. The Town will monitor legislation to allow bridge naming rights to be offered. An inter-municipal agreement may be proposed with Framingham. Eversource will undertake vegetation management between routes 9 and 30, as this section of trail carries overhead utility wires.

The committee anticipates discussions with other town agencies about operations, oversight and maintenance of the CRT after its anticipated opening in 2020. We will also consider a future connection of the CRT to Natick Center and a redesigned Natick Center MBTA commuter rail station, once the design for a new, accessible rail station advances over the course of the year to come.

The Town will also undertake negotiations and acquisition of a small number of temporary and permanent easements for construction and operation of the CRT, and other agreements with abutters as may be required. In addition, the Town will

need to resolve the status of Mechanic Street, which is primarily a private way over which public access must be ensured for safe connections to the CRT, to Navy Yard Field, and to a future public parking facility at 11 Mechanic Street, which will serve both the CRT and Navy Yard. This parking lot is likely to be the subject of a future capital improvements request to properly serve the community.

The CRT Advisory Committee gratefully acknowledges the support of the Board of Selectmen, Town Staff, Town Counsel, Town Meeting and other Town agencies, as well as BETA Group, MassDOT, the MPO, our legislative delegation, the Friends of Natick Trails and all who have helped advance this transformative project.

Information and reports on the CRT project are available at NatickMA.gov/crt.

Respectfully submitted,

Joshua Ostroff, Chair