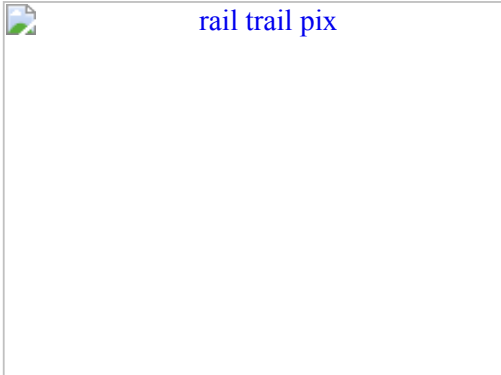




Milford bike trail expansion closer to fruition

Photos



Rick Holmes/Daily News staff

The Upper Charles River Trail in Milford is scheduled to be expanded to Hopkinton and Holliston by 2010.

By Danielle Ameden/Daily News staff

GHS

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MILFORD —

Good news for bicyclists, joggers and dog-walkers: Phase II of the Upper Charles Rail Trail is one step closer to being built.

Things are "marching right along," said rail trail committee chairman Reno DeLuzio, now that the Massachusetts Highway Department has approved 75 percent plans for the \$4.26 million project.

Project engineer Greenman-Pedersen Inc. is working up final design plans, incorporating comments the state sent the committee this week.

"We are still on schedule at this point for bidding in the fall," said Adam Hurtubise, a MassHighway spokesman. "Everybody wants to get this project done."

During a grand opening last June, Milford celebrated completion of Phase I, which is 3 1/2 miles of trail with branching entrances at Sacred Heart Church and Dunkin' Donuts on Main Street that meet at Fino Field and lead to Deer Street (near the Rte. 85/Interstate 495 overpass).

Phase II will pick up where Phase I ends, running from Deer Street to Hopkinton, and from Friendly's restaurant on Medway Road to Holliston, adding 2.9 miles of trail.

In Milford, a trail spur will also run from the Senior Center on North Bow Street up to the Main Street Dunkin' Donuts.

Selectmen Chairman Dino DeBartolomeis said he's gone down to fish at Louisa Lake in Milford and seen tremendous use on the bike trail that runs by it.

"It's added so much to the community, and ... the community should feel very, very proud," he said. "There are a lot of very, very wealthy towns that don't have a bike trail."

Built on old railroad beds, Milford's multipurpose trail will eventually connect with similar stretches planned in Holliston, Sherborn, Ashland and Hopkinton for a 20-mile regional loop trail.

Police regularly patrol the 12-foot-wide path on motorcycles and report no problems.

"It's actually a real gem - it's a nice, nice, nice bike path and we've had no issues," said Police Chief Thomas O'Loughlin.

For Phase II, DeLuzio said the plan is to get final plans submitted by the end of July, with bidding in the fall and a shovel going in the ground next construction season.

There are a few small hurdles to clear, including getting Conservation Commission approval, expected this summer.

The committee has appealed the state's Natural Heritage program, getting a go-ahead after agreeing that the construction contractor will hire an environmental scientist to protect a habitat of wood turtles near where Phase II will be.

"That'll be put in the bid package," DeLuzio said.

Negotiations are still under way over land rights to a one-mile stretch owned by National Grid, but DeLuzio expects a lease agreement will be hammered out soon so the trail can be laid down.

Construction of Phase II is expected to take 12-18 months, shooting completion out to about summer of 2010.

DeBartolomeis thinks back to early stages of planning for the bike trail when townspeople met the project with resistance.

"There were many, many people who thought it wouldn't be utilized," he said.

Now, the trail is popular - a place where people can walk, run, roller blade and bicycle.

"Reno and his committee deserve so much credit," said DeBartolomeis. "You have to go through hoops with all the committees and the approvals and the processes and you need someone to keep it alive."

Danielle Ameden can be reached at 508-634-7521 or dameden@cnc.com.