

REGION

Key link in trail opens in Milford

Backers hope other pieces will follow

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Now that the first section of the Upper Charles Trail is officially open for use in Milford, supporters are hoping that other links in the proposed 20-mile greenway will fall into place.

Milford celebrated the grand opening of a 3.4-mile section this month. The trail runs north from Main Street past Fino Field and Louisa Lake, ending just north of Interstate 495.

Bill Buckley, the chairman of the selectmen who has walked the trail several times, said it "came out beautiful" and is reminiscent of a walk through the woods of Maine or Vermont.

"On parts of the trail, it's amazing to me that you're still within the town borders," he said. "It's so secluded. It's access to nature without having to leave town."

Plans call for the trail to run through four other communities — Holliston, Ashland, Sherborn, and Hopkinton.

The project, which officially began a decade ago, calls for converting abandoned rail beds into trails for use by walkers, joggers, and bicyclists. Costs are being covered by a combination of federal, state, and local funds.

Supporters of the trail hope that a second phase of the project, a 3-mile path that would connect the current trail to neighboring Holliston, can be started soon. But the plans are dependent on negotiations with utility company National

Link in planned 20-mile rail trail now open in Milford; others sought

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Grid, according to Milford's rail trail committee chairman, Reno DeLuzio.

The town needs to gain access to a 1-mile stretch of old rail line running from Route 109 to near the Holliston town line. Currently, National Grid, which owns the property, and the Federal Highway Administration disagree about what type of agreement Milford should enter in order to use the land, DeLuzio said. The federal agency has a voice in the negotiations because there are federal tax dollars involved, he said.

DeLuzio said he hopes talks with National Grid will reach a resolution in the near future, but

the design for that portion of the trail is continuing to move forward anyway.

Meanwhile, Holliston is talking to CSX Corp. about buying 6 miles of rail corridor in that town. Holliston is also negotiating with CSX on behalf of Sherborn, which hopes to buy a third-of-a-mile strip of land from the company.

Robert Weidknecht, Holliston's trail committee chairman, said the major issue for both towns is the purchase price. CSX is asking far more for the land than the town believes it's worth. The freight rail company wants as much as four times the value estimated by an appraiser hired by the town, he said.

Weidknecht, who said he isn't

allowed to disclose the suggested prices associated with the land, said CSX is now only asking for twice the land's locally appraised value. But it's still not low enough, he said, and the town is enlisting the help of the nonprofit Trust for Public Land to help lobby CSX to come closer to the town's price.

"Quite a few of these towns are trying to deal with CSX's ridiculous appraisal price," Weidknecht said. "CSX has to be more reasonable."

CSX spokesman Bob Sullivan said he believes it is normal for there to be different appraisals a first, and said the company would be glad to work with the town to find a third appraiser that all parties could agree upon.

"We're more than willing to do that," Sullivan said.

The negotiations in Holliston have been going on for the past six months, he said. Still, he is optimistic that a purchase-and-sale agreement could be reached by all the parties by the end of the year.

Because of an expected redesign of the Holliston section of the trail, Weidknecht said, the earliest date for construction to start there is in fall of next year.

In Hopkinton, a 1.1-mile segment of the trail is nearly completed, said resident Liisa Jackson.

Unlike the Milford section, the Hopkinton trail, which runs from Main Street to Chamberlain Street, is unpaved. The trail need only minor work and is now open for use, said Jackson, who spearheaded the project.

The goal in the future is to connect the trail to the Milford segment of the Upper Charles Trail and to a segment in Ashland, she said.

Members of the open space committees in Ashland and Sherborn did not immediately return messages seeking comment.