

Ground is broken on Upper Charles Trail

By **Sara Withee / Daily News Staff**

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MILFORD -- With the push of a shovel, Milford yesterday celebrated being the first town to start work on the long-planned Upper Charles Trail yesterday.

Gathering at the trail head off East Main Street, several dozen town employees, officials and residents observed the groundbreaking of the highly anticipated first 3-mile phase.

"It goes without saying this project has a high level of local support," said Reno DeLuzio, chairman of the Milford Upper Charles Trail Committee.

When complete, the trail will run 27 miles from Milford to Framingham. Six-and-a-half miles will be in Milford.

The trail concept originated with Holliston's Open Space Plan in 1986, said Robert Weidknecht, chairman of that town's Trails Committee and a landscape architect with Beals and Thomas. The Southborough company volunteered some of the early engineering work for the trail.

Years ago, Milford Conservation Commission Chairman Bob Buckley made a bet with Weidknecht and his colleague John Thomas, another Holliston resident, about which town would eventually start building its trails first.

Buckley cashed in his cheese pizza prize last week, but Weidknecht said he is just pleased to see trail construction begin.

"It's great," he said. "It's been a long time in the coming."

Northern Construction began work several weeks ago on the first \$3 million phase from East Main Street past Interstate 495 and DeLuzio anticipates its completion by late fall. A ribbon-cutting ceremony will likely follow next spring, he said.

Despite the committee's property-access hurdles, residents have been mostly excited about Milford's trail, Conservation Commission Chairman Bob Buckley said.

"There's been very little opposition," he said. "There's been concern and we've addressed those concerns. Overall, these bike trails are just a plus for everyone."

Trail Committee member Peg Knowlton agreed. "It's going to be great. I'm going to buy cross-country skis."

Tony Niro, a member of the Friends of the Trail Committee, said he recently saw the trail's benefit as he walked down the future path by Louisa Lake and was greeted by geese and goslings.

"The Louisa Lake area is beautiful," he said.

The first \$3 million stretch of Milford's trail will wind from the commuter lot across from Sacred Heart Church through Fino Field, across Dilla Street, past Louisa Lake and down Cedar Street past I-495 to a new road named Deer Street.

State and federal funds are paying for most of the first and second phases. But Milford's annual Town Meeting will be asked to appropriate another \$150,000 for construction of the second section, which will run from the Dunkin' Donuts on Main Street to the Senior Center on North Bow Street.

The trail is also slated to run through Holliston, Hopkinton, Sherborn and Ashland.

Trails in Holliston and Sherborn have been on hold pending acquisition of railroad beds. But after several years of standstill, Weidknecht said property owner CSX has informed town officials the property's sale is a priority.

In Milford, those involved in the trail committee credited DeLuzio for the town's lead.

Parks Director Mike Bresciani said DeLuzio is "the driving force behind this, without a doubt."

Buckley added, "It's really all Reno. At this point, he's volunteering his time. He's retired as town planner but he hasn't given up on the project."

((Sara Withee can be reached at 508-634-7546 or swithee@cnc.com.))