

Rail trail gets state boost

Baker-Polito Administration announces grants for 71 state projects

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GROTON - Governor Charlie Baker and Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito announced last week that public trails in over 70 towns - including Groton and Townsend - will have improvement projects funded thanks to \$5 million in MassTrails Grants.

One of the projects selected includes the construction of the Squannacook River Rail Trail, a 3.7-mile stone-dust trail to be constructed along the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority track right of way that runs through both towns.

The \$27,780 in grant money would not only go to the construction of the trail but also signs displaying safety and accessibility information along with benches and a kiosk.

Bill Rideout, treasurer of the Squannacook Greenways, Inc., said on Tuesday that the nonprofit has been raising money to support the construction of the trail since 2015 when it signed a lease with the MBTA to work on the land.

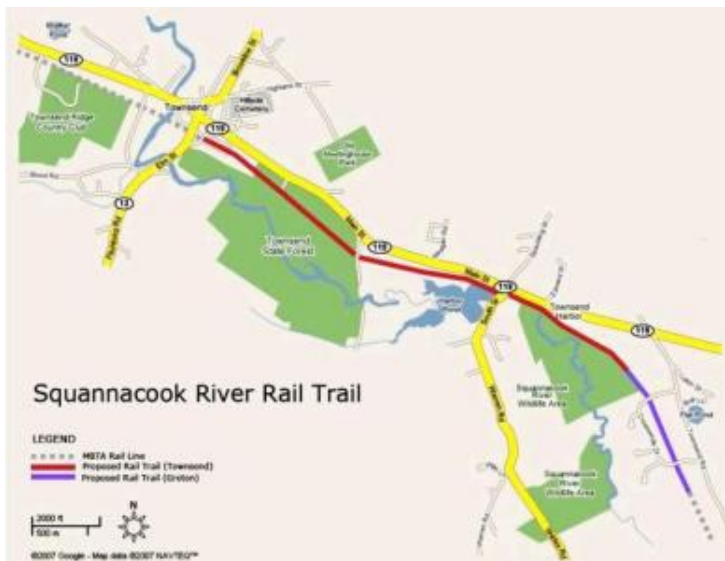
Rideout said that the trail project itself has been in the works since 2003 as a means for residents and children to walk or bike around town.

The project has been delayed over the years because both Groton and Townsend were hesitant to sign the MBTA lease, concerned about taking on the environmental responsibility of the land. With the grant, the group surpassed its goal of \$150,000 and looks to start construction of the trail on November 7 this year.

"I'm waiting for the trail to open," Rideout said. "That's when I'll celebrate."

Said money comes from the capital budget of the state's Department of Conservation and Recreation, along with the motor fuel excise tax on off-road vehicles. That tax comes from the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Federal Surface Transportation Act in coordination with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation. Each recipient of grant money must match it by a minimum of 20 percent of the cost of each town's project.

"Massachusetts is home to thousands of miles of public trails, and today's MassTrails Grants will aid in the improvement of these trails and assist in the creation of new sections for the public to enjoy," Baker said in a press release. "The MassTrails Grants serve as a great example of our administration's dedication to ensuring that the Commonwealth's natural, cultural, and recreational resources remain accessible for years to come."



A map of the Squannacook River Rail Trail that would run through Townsend and Groton. (Photo courtesy of Bill Rideout/Squannacook Greenways, Inc.)

Another of the projects selected for grant money is the Connector Trail, .35 miles of additional rail bed that would connect local shopping centers and neighborhoods under the Lowell Connector highway. Pedestrians would be able to see aerosol art along the way as a "cultural centerpiece" of the walk. The grant money totals \$180,000.

Fitchburg will also have the first phase of its Coggshall Park Mirror Lake Accessibility Project funded with \$50,000 in grant money. The project is looking to make the Mirror Lake Loop Trail handicap accessible, with phase one being the design and construction of a boardwalk along the shoreline of Mirror Lake. The boardwalk would run from the end of the current trail to the Coggshall Park Gazebo and Bandstand.

"Our administration is proud to prioritize the state trails system, which builds community pride, connects municipalities, and improves quality of life throughout Massachusetts," Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito said in a press release. "By working in partnership to support these 71 trail projects, we are able to invest in the enhancement of our communities, and ensure natural resources are protected and available for all to appreciate and enjoy."

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