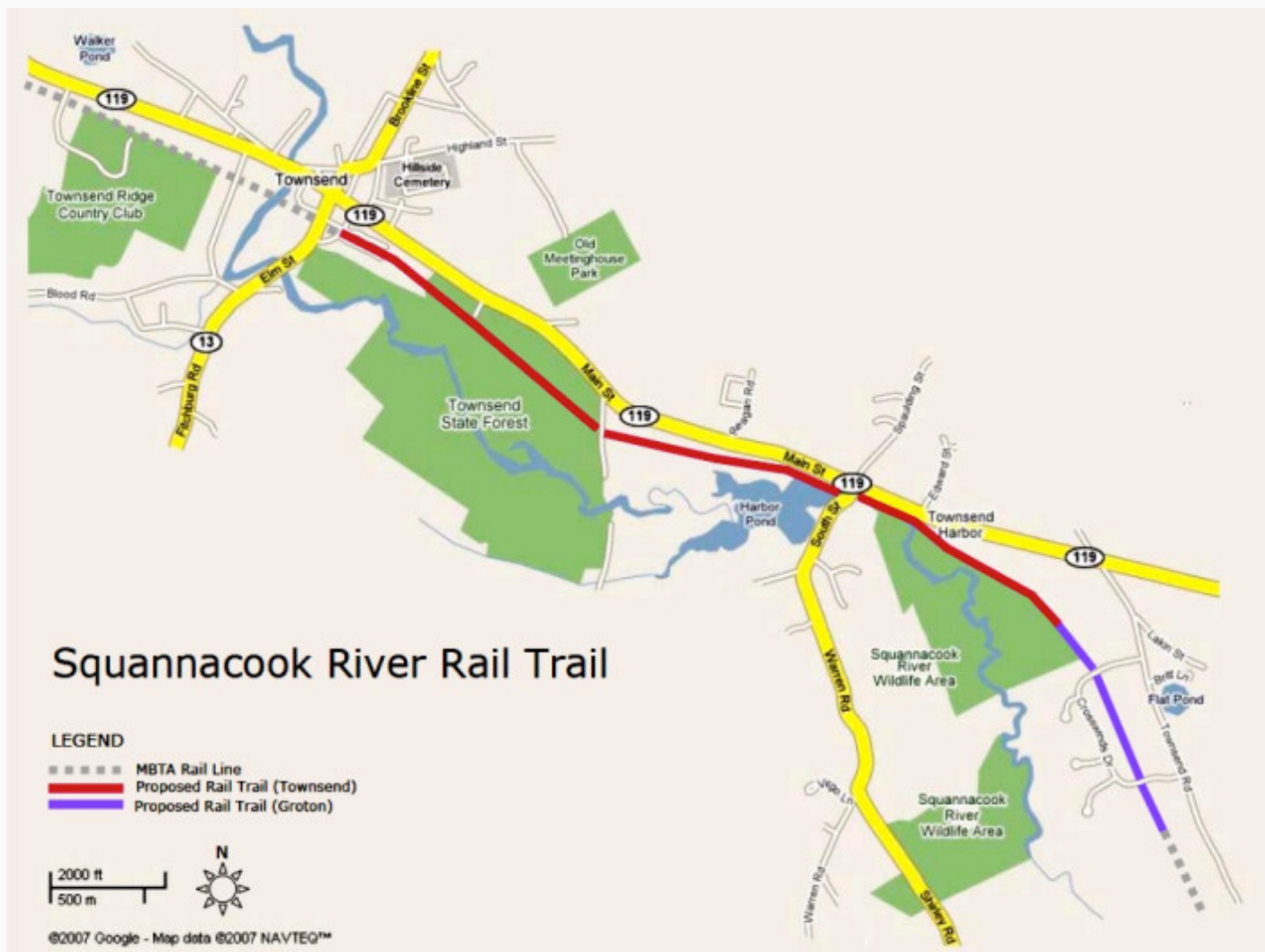


NEWS

# Townsend-Groton rail trail corridor cleared

Squannacook River Rail Trail development now awaits new contractor



A map of what the Squannacook River Rail Trail will look like when completed

By **JON WINKLER** | [jwinkler@nashobavalleyvoice.com](mailto:jwinkler@nashobavalleyvoice.com) | Nashoba Valley Voice  
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GROTON – The Squannacook River Rail Trail has metaphorically cleared another hurdle by literally clearing land.

Squannacook Greenways, Inc., the nonprofit organization that's been raising money to pay for the trail, announced this month that the trail running from Townsend to West Groton has been fully cleared of trees.

This comes about two months after construction began on the 3.7-mile stone dust trail being built along the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority track right of way that runs through both towns. The trail is meant to be another means for residents to view the area's nature views, including the Townsend State Forest, Harbor Pond and the Squannacook River Wildlife Area.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, other state rail trails are going through extensions to improve their outreach to residents. These include the Mass Central Rail Trail, which is having extensions in Waltham, Sudbury and Hudson set to be finished over the next three years. There's also the Cape Cod Rail Trail, which is having extensions in Wellfleet and Barnstable set to be finished over the next three years.

The development of the trail has been in the works since 2003, though it took some time to get it off the ground due to the environmental responsibility Groton and Townsend would take on in managing the trail.

The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority signed a ninety-nine year lease with Squannacook Greenways, Inc. in Jan. 2015, essentially giving the project the green light. The nonprofit's capital campaign went on to raise over \$162,000 to pay for the construction of the trail through acquisition of grants and fundraising.

Peter Cunningham, president of Squannacook Greenways, said that it cost around \$10,000 to cut down the trees for the clearing. The bulk of the clearing work took place during this fall/winter because, as Cunningham explained, Squannacook Greenways was given a window of clearing time from Nov. 15 last year to Mar. 15 this year by the MassWildlife's Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program. Cunningham said this time frame was chosen by the program to avoid disturbing turtles near the trail.

"We had gone out previously and done some selective cutting," he added. "The bulk of it was done when we had a tree service come in with the heavy equipment. A lot of the stuff they cut up, they chipped and send off, and it has some retail value to it."

The trail is a long way away from being open for hikes and bike rides. Cunningham said that the next phase of the construction will consist of digging up the rails of the old railroad that ran through the section of land selected for the trail. Cunningham said trains stopped running on the now-buried tracks in the early 1980s. He added that Squannacook Greenways is getting ready to go out to bid over the next few months for a contractor and expects the digging to take place over three years, depending on funding. Because Squannacook Greenways will still follow the permitting rules from MassWildlife's program, the actual work won't start until Nov. 2020.

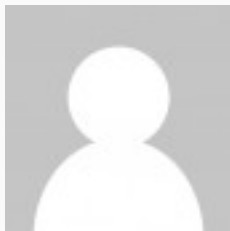
"The next phase will be pulling up the rails to dispose of those, sort-of leave a graded base and then on top of that, we're going to put down stone dust," Cunningham said. "It does compact to very hard surface, yet it's also permeable and allows water and moisture to sink into it."

Cunningham added that the next phase of work is estimated to cost \$300,000. He added that Squannacook Greenways will raise the money through more trails grants from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation and local fundraising efforts.

"It's been a real labor of love," Cunningham said. "There are a lot of us that have been part of the effort to do this for a long time and it's going to be a huge asset."

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Tags: **Groton**



## Jon Winkler

Jon Winkler is a 25-year-old reporter covering government, education and human interest in Ayer, Groton, Pepperell, Shirley and Townsend for the Nashoba Valley Voice. He previously covered education and local government in East Hampton and Southampton, New York. Jon is a New England original, born in Nashua and raised in Merrimack, New Hampshire.

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