

Rail Trail chugs toward construction in Topsfield

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TOPSFIELD — The second part of Topsfield's "rail trail" was pushed toward the planning stages this week, while overall construction could begin as soon as this winter's snow melts away.

"We still don't have anything in the ground, but the ground's starting to shake," quipped Joe Geller, chairman of the town's Rail Trail Committee.

The group may release bid packets for the first part of construction, running generally behind Proctor School and a downtown shopping strip. That pathway parallels Grove Street from Washington Street to Main Street.

That part of the trail will be the focus of a 8 p.m. forum on Dec. 8 at the Gould Barn, 1 Howlett St. Geller said he hopes to get the public's comments on a nearly completed plan for the trail. The biggest question remaining is whether to cut between two playgrounds near Proctor School, or to swerve around them.

Even while those plans are being finalized, the next part of the trail is being planned. The town gave the committee permission to plan a piece of the rail trail running from Main Street to Summer Street, paralleling Park Street, where much of the former rail line right-of-way is now taken over by a town parking lot. Geller said he thinks the parking lot can be shuffled so no spaces are lost.

The rail trail committee will also look to see if a commuter bus could pick up residents elsewhere, freeing more spots up along Park Street.

Geller said no town money will be used to build the rail trail. He said more than \$30,000 will be available to build the first part of the trail, while he's waiting to hear details about a \$50,000 state Department of Conservation and Recreation grant to plan and build another part of the trail, from Summer Street to Route 1.

The Rail Trail Committee would also love to hear from companies or volunteers with heavy equipment.

"We wouldn't look the other way," he said.