

Regional rail

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trail group meets

MassHighway agrees to hire consultant

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A regional task force to examine a potential 29-mile bike trail, called the Border-to-Boston trail, met at Boxford Town Hall Wednesday morning to discuss fundraising and design issues with the project.

The task force included MassHighway, National Grid, and representatives from the eight communities involved, including Boxford, Topsfield, Danvers, Wenham, Georgetown, Newbury, Newburyport and Salisbury.

A key result of the meeting was MassHighway's approval to hire a consultant firm to create a comprehensive work study that examines aspects relative to all areas the trail might affect.

The consultant firm will look at where fences are needed, the impact on wetland areas, and crossways over busy roads, and will be considering the width and route of the overall trail.

When the study is complete, it will be used as a tool to guide the bidding process when looking for a company to actually perform the legwork, which would include going to all neighboring towns for permitting.

Joe Geller, chairman of the Rail Trail Committee in Topsfield, said that each community will still be responsible for public outreach and are encouraged to gather the sentiment of residents.

Geller said the work done for the Border-to-Boston trail would simply build on headway that any of the neighboring communities have already achieved.

The Border-to-Boston coalition grew out of a grant from the National Parks Service that loaned an experienced Parks Service trail consultant to the cause.

Geller said the service's consultant, Steve Golden, is an "excellent individual" that had been one of the project leaders in the formation of the Appalachian Trail, which runs 2175 miles from Maine to Georgia.

"I have been getting telephone calls from people that are very much in support of the trail," Geller said about phone calls he's received in recent weeks after media coverage of residents criticizing the Rail Trail Committee.

Geller said that a local painter had contacted him and mentioned a painting she did of a railroad bridge crossing the Ipswich River that is considered part of the trail, offering to sell prints of the painting to toward trail fundraising.

Geller said the Rail Trail committee will be holding a public forum to present information and invite discussion about the entire trail to go through Topsfield, expanding past phase one, which would connect Washington Street and Main Street.