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## Format for rail trail forum released

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TOPSFIELD - Topsfield residents looking for more information regarding the town's plans to build a recreational rail trail will get a golden opportunity to do so later this month at a forum at the town library.

The forum, scheduled for Monday, March 24 at 7 p.m. at the Topsfield Town Library, will be in the hands of Town Moderator John P. Kinhan. It will feature representatives from the Rail Trail Committee and the Coalition for Neighborhood Information.

The forum is broken into eight segments including an introduction by Kinhan, questions posed to both sides, questions from the audience and closing statements. The questions posed by Kinhan asks the Rail Trail Committee to discuss how much the project will cost to build and maintain as well as what measures will be taken to protect rail trail users.

"We're very much looking forward to it," Rail Trail Committee Chairman Joe Geller said Thursday "The coalition has said we need more public stuff and we absolutely agree."

Geller said having a moderated debate on the subject will be more productive and informative than recent discussions. Those discussions took place over the winter during multiple Board of Selectmen meetings. The tenure of one discussion prompted selectmen to chide members from both groups.

"Having a moderator there is great," Geller said.

The proposed project has been heavily criticized by the community coalition, whose members have expressed concerns over the proximity of the rail trail to Proctor Elementary, a nearby park for small children and surrounding houses. They have been critical in the way the Rail Trail Committee and selectmen have presented the project to residents.

Both sides of the debate have been preparing for the forum in different ways. The Rail Trail Committee has updated its Web site and put together an informational flier

The coalition has scheduled a potluck supper this Sunday at the Washington Street home of Bob and Cathy Morgan. The first section of the rail trail would be built between Washington Street and Main Street.

When asked for more information, Cathy Morgan declined comment.

The Morgans publicized the potluck supper with a flier of their own that has raised eyebrows amongst the Rail Trail Committee and town employees.

The flier references the 1939 film "The Wizard of Oz," and compares the mannerisms of the "Wizard" to the Board of Selectmen. Both, the flier implies, demanded silence from those who have questioned their decisions.

Geller said he wouldn't be attending the event.

"What purpose would that serve? I'd be glad to chat anywhere and anytime within reason, with anyone, even the Morgans," Geller said.

The flier comes after Bob Morgan formally applied to join the Rail Trail Committee. Due to scheduling conflicts, it's unlikely that any decision on Morgan's application would be reached before the forum. Asked whether the flier would affect his application, Geller was unclear.

"It certainly doesn't endear us to him," Geller said.

Comments (6)

trail issue

2008-03-15T02:07:35

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Looking at this issue from a non-abutter, I would ask, is this an allowable use in the zone and what protects my neighbors that live next to this trail. Is this use an asset to all of us or could it become a real problem? Is this a few pushing against the majority?

The answer to the first question is a recreational sports facility is NOT PERMITTED in much of the zone it occupies.

4.24 Fitness and recreational sports facilities NP NP NP S S S

In other zones it's by special permit.

I vote no on the trail

P.K

2008-03-15T11:47:42

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Horses-Walkers-Babys-Bike Riders-I for one would not want all that and have a Spooked horse kill someone! Who will pick up after the Horses? Please VOTE NO !

MD

2008-03-16T00:00:11

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OH NO!! Babies and walkers!!! Why are people so opposed to this? To close to the school...this is a problem? Crime will grow 10X? Wow....sounds like when we were trying to vote out Topsfields history of being a dry town. I honestly believe the benefits of this rail trail would be fantastic for this town and believe a strong majority will show this. The coalition seems like a Rail Trail killing task force in my opinion. They need to step back and really understand how they are portraying themselves....it's not in a good way. Will horses really be allowed on this trail?

Topsfield resident

2008-03-17T12:26:13

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Hmm, let's see what benefits come from the rail trail project...enables walking or riding safely to Pye Brook Park, Proctor School, Downtown, Churches, Topsfield Fairgrounds, Ipswich River @97. All of which require risking life/limb presently as many streets in town have no sidewalks or adequate bike lanes to protect the "non-motorized".

Costs, some abutters lose a 10ft wide strip of quiet space and a place to dump their leaves, and will have to tolerate neighbors walking through their "yard". I understand that status quo is a powerful thing, especially when it comes to property, but the land is useless as is and would be a tremendous asset if converted.

As for the crime issue, I used RR tracks to travel around my home town, never had a problem, and it was not maintained and a much tougher area than this rose garden of a town. If your worried about kids using it as a congregation place, well they should be already and I could present evidence to support it (beer bottles, shed underwear, etc) so cleaning and opening it up to more traffic would only eliminate the present uses of the ROW.

I think the whole "horse use" claim is just a grab by the proponents who wish to ally with as many possible groups to gain support. Horses in my opinion, belong on wide open trails (Willowdale or Bradley Palmer come to mind) not sharing a narrow trail with foot traffic.

Hey, try and find someone in town who can remember STEAM LOCOMOTIVES travelling on the railroad. I'm sure people learned to live with those.

Or perhaps the abutters would like annex their neighboring portion of the ROW from Guilford or MBTA and add it to their tax assessment.

P.K  
2008-03-18T01:27:56

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Yes Horses are a big part of this plan, a RT128 for Horses. We have too many out of town bike riders now, Do we need to give them a race track ?Get this to a vote ! It will not pass

Joe Geller, Chairman of the Topsfield Rail Trail Committee

2008-03-18T02:30:05

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In the "trail issue" comment above the author incorrectly states that the rail trail is not permitted in much of the zones it occupies. "Publicly owned recreational facilities" are permitted in all zoning districts according to Article III, Section 3.02, of the Table of Uses 2.6. See <http://topsfield-ma.gov/documents/ARTICLEIII.pdf>.

In the same comment the author states "Is this a few pushing against the majority" to create the trail? I would point out that the past two town wide surveys of the Open Space Committee indicated overwhelming support for the trail.

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