

Work resumes on Topsfield shopping center septic system

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Topsfield -

Usually the stench from a septic system leads people to crinkle their noses and quickly walk in another direction. But for Topsfield Village Shopping Centre business owners and town officials, that telltale scent earlier this week likely was a breath of a fresh air. It meant that after months of inactivity, workers had returned to the shopping plaza to resume installation of a new septic system.

“On many levels we’re happy to see (the project) moving along,” Town Administrator Virginia Wilder said.

Shopping plaza owner Spiros Flomp last year hired Raggs Inc., of Concord, to install an improved system capable of handling more wastewater. Last November, workers installed three new septic tanks ranging in capacity from 7,000 to 13,000 gallons. But work was halted soon after the discovery of groundwater near the current septic system’s leach field.

Since then the job site, for the most part, has been dormant. That changed Tuesday when workers came back to the job site and began pumping out what Topsfield Health Agent John Coulon called seepage from the new tanks. A day later, workers were back drying and resealing the tanks.

Coulon said the next step would be to begin digging a trench for a leach field that will run from the Gift Horse, behind the town’s Post Office and near the Topsfield Station building.

“We’re glad to see them back,” Coulon said of the workers.

To accommodate the leach field, a significant portion of the parking lot will have to be torn apart and resurfaced at a higher elevation, about a foot. The higher elevation will

also make it possible for the next segment of the town's rail trail to be built, according to Topsfield Rail Trail Committee Chairman Joe Geller.

Geller said the higher elevation would reduce or eliminate the formation of puddles on the rail trail making it more accessible to those seeking passive recreation.

"That's great to hear that they're working on that again. It will make installation of the trail easier," Geller said.

Geller said the next stretch of the rail trail is expected to be built near the Topsfield Station, owned by Brian Woodland, starting in July.

"That way we'll have a continuous trail from Washington Street to Summer Street completing phase one," Geller said.

Topsfield is joining other communities in building a 26-mile bike path on abandoned railroad tracks that would run through Salisbury, Newbury, Newburyport, Georgetown, Boxford, Topsfield, Danvers, and Wenham.

It is unclear why work had been delayed this long. Town officials first said inclement weather forced work crews to stop until spring. Some business owners wondered whether there were financial disagreements between the contractor and Flomp. Geller said he was told the delay was due to "health issues."

Calls to Fred Fish, owner of Raggs Inc., were not returned in time for this edition.

Regardless, town officials became increasingly concerned in recent weeks about when workers would return to the job site. Coulon said he fielded many calls from town officials, including selectmen, and business owners regarding the project's status. That led Coulon to call the contractor on several occasions asking the same questions.

As for when work would be completed, Coulon was unsure, saying he heard it could be another two months.

"It's too early to tell," he said.