



# Northampton Rail-trail News

Friends of the Northampton Trails and Greenways, Inc. (www.fntg.net)

Volume 1, Fall 2006

## Updates from the trail

There's been a lot happening with the rail-trails of Northampton, and as the leaves fall, and fall turns to winter, it's a great opportunity to update you on some of the activities of the Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways. A group of involved neighbors established FNTG in January to advocate for the growing network of rail-trails in our community. As a newly established non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, it replaced the former Northampton Pedestrian and Bicycle Alliance. The goals of the group are to raise funds for the trails, push for their continued development, educate and encourage new users of the trails, create resources to improve them, and organize fun, community-building activities.

As a member organization, FNTG is strengthened by its broad-based community of members who join because they, like you, are interested in seeing our trails

in Northampton flourish. FNTG volunteers have been working on a number of projects, including the creation of a map of the expanding network of trails, encouraging the city council to remove the "Walk your bikes" ordinance, attending Conservation Commission meeting, and coordination with other organization on joint projects.

The growing network of trails in Northampton is a very special resource in our community, and it is worthy of our support. The Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways (FNTG) exists for just that purpose. We urge you to join or renew your membership, and support our efforts to continue to improve these trails.

*Nicholas Horton  
President, FNTG*

## Greenways, green infrastructure and sustainability

Planning for sustainable communities is a complex process addressing the economic, environmental and socially-equitable dimensions of sustainability. Greenways and greenspaces play a key role in this development. On **Monday, November 13th at 7:00pm**, Jack Ahern, Professor and Chair of Landscape Architecture at

UMass Amherst, will provide an accessible overview of theories and practices of landscape ecology with examples from nearby as well as around the world that we might be able to apply in Northampton. He will focus on the creation of *green infrastructures*, an emerging design concept for cities and towns that utilizes a system of hybrid hydrological/drainage network with

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protected or opportunistic green areas to provide a city-wide plan for different ecological functions. The results help to sustain diverse and healthy wildlife, recreation and transportation along with built environments.

The talk is co-sponsored with the Smith Col-

lege Sustainability Committee. It will take place at Smith College at the Clark Science Center (McConnell 103), is free and open to the public. For more information, please contact Nicholas Horton ([nicholas\\_horton@yahoo.com](mailto:nicholas_horton@yahoo.com)).

## Future of Northampton trails and greenways

About 70 people, including several Northampton City Councilors, attended the FNTG spring meeting on June 5th. The attendees heard Wayne Feiden describe the coming trails and greenways in Northampton.

Wayne, Director of the Office of Planning and Development for the City of Northampton, has been working to create a spine of trails and greenways that connect the entire City. Through the creative use of mapping software and images, he led a virtual tour of the trail network, beginning with the extension of the Norwottuck Rail Trail from Damon Rd. to the King St. area (alas, still not yet completed), the extension of the Nagle Walkway

to Veterans Field, Route 66 and Earle Street (now out for bid), the new segment connecting the Ice Pond development (awaiting final grading) and the extension of the Bikeway to Look Park and Leeds (in the final design stage). Wayne also discussed plans for a "rail-with-trail" along King Street from the Stop and Shop to Union Station, and connection with the Manhan Rail Trail in Easthampton.

The meeting featured the public unveiling of the map of the Northampton rail-trails.

*Julia Riseman*  
Secretary, FNTG

## Trail use survey

On my regular walks and rides on the Northampton rail-trail, I continue to be impressed by the variety and quantity of people using the trail. Commuters, dawdlers, bikers, walkers are all well represented. I see kids commuting to school, pairs of friends exercising together, someone who looked to be biking to Amherst, a rollerblader, someone bird watching, several dog-walkers, and me, enjoying a shaded, quiet, car-free path to Florence.



Figure 1: Trail users (credit Craig Della Penna)

But how many people actually use the trail? Thanks to the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC, [www.pvpc.org](http://www.pvpc.org)), we have some estimates.

Over the period from April through November 2005, PVPC installed an infra-red signal detector on the trail in Florence. While there is some potential error for counts using this equipment, the results were quite interesting.

Not surprisingly, peak usage of the trail occurred on warm weekends during the summer (maximum count was 736 crossings one day at the end of May). Usage was lower during the early winter, but still received regular usage (weekday volume during the first two weeks in November was 280 users per day).

Overall, PVPC estimates that 100,000 to 120,000 people use the trail near Chestnut St. in Florence per year. It's not just used on summer weekends! In addition, as the trail network expands, we expect these numbers to increase.

*Julia Riseman*  
Secretary, FNTG

## Tuesday evening tours

Many riders joined Craig Della Penna for one or more of his dozen Tuesday evening bike rides this summer. While the heavy mid-week rains of May and June played havoc with the schedule early on, later rides went off without a hitch.

Craig led these rides that explored the Northampton bikeway, the Manhan Rail Trail, connections to the Norwottuck, the Leeds extension, and future trail plans along King Street to downtown Northampton. These

rides provided a wonderful introduction to the historical, political, legal and environmental issues involved in building rail trails in Massachusetts, featuring Craig's unedited insider's take. These rides were co-sponsored by the Appalachian Mountain Club, and an article about them appeared in the Berkshire Chapter newsletter.

FNTG is planning a series of walking tours this winter as well as next summer for those not able to bike, and we also hope that Craig will continue to offer these free guided tours.

## Bike crossing ordinance and gates

City law used to require bikes on the Northampton Rail-trail to dismount before crossing the street at an intersection. Several FNTG members and others within the community noted the potential hazard this creates, particularly for those with trailers.

This summer, the City Council passed an amendment to replace the requirement to walk all bicycles across street crossings with the requirement to stop at all street crossings and yield the right-of-way to vehicles in the road. Within a few days, the Department of Public Works removed the obsolete signs.

In addition, this summer the old-style (and somewhat dangerous) gates at intersections were removed and replaced with bollards.

It's still important for bikers to yield to cars at these intersections (according to the law pedestrians have priority over cars, cars have priority over bikes) but these changes should help to improve the flow at intersections.

*Susan Voss*  
Treasurer, FNTG

## Next steps for the trail

In the fall of 2001, many people in the City came together under the banner of *Northampton Pedestrian-Bicycle Alliance* to try and match a generous \$5,000 challenge grant donation that was provided by a local family for trail betterments in the city. The Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways has now taken over for NPBA, but we remain committed to helping raise money that the City of Northampton can use to leverage trail development efforts. We are now beginning the sixth year in this annual effort.

Money raised in past years helped to design and pay for the pedestrian traffic signal at Stop and Shop, acquire corridor in Leeds, design the Ice Pond Trail, and finalize plans for the extension from City Hall to Earle Street.

This year, we are looking to continue to raise \$5,000 for trail design costs, including the design for the tunnel underneath the active rail line behind King Street near

Wendy's.

We are asking you to consider making a donation towards the design of the railroad crossing and the planned path along King Street to downtown Northampton. Your donation will be leveraged by the \$5,000 challenge grant, and send a strong message to city leaders that our trails and greenways are an important priority. In past year's the City Council and Mayor have responded to this show of support by designating other funds to improve the trails. City dollars also leverage state and federal funds, which typically require projects to be fully designed. Meeting this challenge grant will speed up trail projects everywhere in the city.

*Nicholas Horton*  
President, FNTG  
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## News from other trail projects

While there's lots of news here in Northampton, there are also exciting things happening on trails that we connect to further afield.

The New Haven to Northampton rail trail is a planned 80 mile path that is gradually being stitched together. Town by town updates on progress, as well as links to organizations along the trail can be found at <http://www.newhaven-and-northampton.org>.

The MassCentral Rail Trail is a similar route planned from Northampton to Boston, with web-page at <http://www.masscentralrailtrail.org>.

<http://www.masscentralrailtrail.org>.

The Friends of the Manhan Rail Trail <http://manhanrailtrail.org> photo contest was a resounding success, and the winning entries were exhibited in the spring at the Nashawannuck Gallery and the Easthampton Municipal Offices.

Our own Craig Della Penna edits a free HTML email newsletter about trails and greenways in the region. Go to <http://www.greenwaysolutions.org> and scroll down to the 'sign-up' button to be added to this informative list.

## Upcoming Events

**Monday, November 13th, 2006** *Greenways and Green Infrastructure: A Strategy for Sustainability?*

Jack Ahern, Professor and Chair, Department of Landscape Architecture (UMass) 7:00pm McConnell 103, Smith College Clark Science Center (see article on p. 1)

**Sunday, November 19th, 2006** Wachusett Greenways Nature Walk in Holden (contact Nicholas Horton, 413-587-0430 to join carpool at 11:30am).

**Saturday, December 2nd, 2006** Walking tour of Northampton trail extensions (10:30am), contact Nicholas Horton [nicholas\\_horton@yahoo.com](mailto:nicholas_horton@yahoo.com) to sign up and more information

**Saturday, January 6th, 2007** Walking tour of Northampton trail extensions (10:30am), contact Nicholas Horton [nicholas\\_horton@yahoo.com](mailto:nicholas_horton@yahoo.com) to sign up and more information

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