



Northampton Rail-trail News

Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways, Inc. (<http://www.fntg.net>) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that supports the expanding network of rail-trails in Northampton, Massachusetts. Volume 6, Spring 2012

Plans for summer and beyond

It's been another busy spring on the trails and greenways of Northampton and surrounding communities. Thanks to the work of many volunteers and the FNTG officers, we've had a successful fundraiser for the City and have helped to support trail construction and renovation efforts of all sorts. We're also really excited about the photo and video contest (see related articles on all of these later in the newsletter).

We've enclosed a copy of our map and brochure for your use (or to share with a friend or neighbor who might not have one).

We had a great turnout for our "Lost Canals of Northampton" tour in the fall, which featured a walk and maps of some of the remains from the canal which connected Northampton to New Haven from 1835-1847. See the events listing for a tour of the northern segment, as well as other activities.

This spring's trail cleanup was ably led by John Powers and Julia Riseman, and helped removed dozens of bags of trash and recycling all over town (plus a plastic child's slide, an old mattress, old tires and other detritus). Thanks as well to Stop and Shop for their support.

There's exciting news from Westfield (see separate article) as well as Southampton, where the local organizing group is making progress on many fronts. Some highlights include applying for a state Land grant, garnering support of both Sen. Knapik and Rep. Kocot for this project, establishing working relationships estab-

lished with the Pioneer Valley Railroad, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, the Friends of the Columbia Greenway in Westfield, and other groups as well as the re-activation of the Southampton Friends group.

The Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways was established in 2006 to help support this growing network of transportation and recreation paths in Northampton and surrounding communities. Your volunteer efforts and financial support help to extend them even further. In addition to our ongoing work, we are looking for volunteers to take on some tasks which are important but do not require a huge investment of time.

In particular, we are seeking someone to help coordinate our ad-hoc maintenance committee, which has been working to clean up particular areas, work with businesses to maintain a segment of the trail, and coordinate with city efforts. We are also seeking an events planner, to coordinate activities which would be run by volunteers. We would love to be able to offer more tours, particularly one on wildflowers. Finally, we are looking for someone to help staff an FNTG table at the Bike Breakfast. Please contact any of the FNTG Officers (Nicholas Horton, Sean Kinlin, Mary Jo Stanley or Julia Riseman) if you are interested in hearing more or volunteering.

See you on the trails!

Nicholas Horton, President

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Columbia Greenway Rail Trail Update

New life has been given to the long dormant idea of turning an abandoned spur of the Columbia Rail into a 3.2 mile multi-modal pathway traversing Westfield's downtown. Stretching from the Southwick town line to just north of the Westfield River, the future Columbia Greenway Rail Trail will traverse downtown on an elevated line with bridge crossings of all streets in the downtown. The Columbia Greenway Rail Trail is one of only two elevated trails coursing through a downtown in the U.S., second only to The High Line <http://www.thehighline.org/> in New York City.

The Trail will tie into Southwick's Farmington Valley Greenway to the south, extending to New Haven, Conn. At a future date, the Trail will extent northward from the Westfield River to eventually tie into additional trails in Southampton, Easthampton, and Northampton.

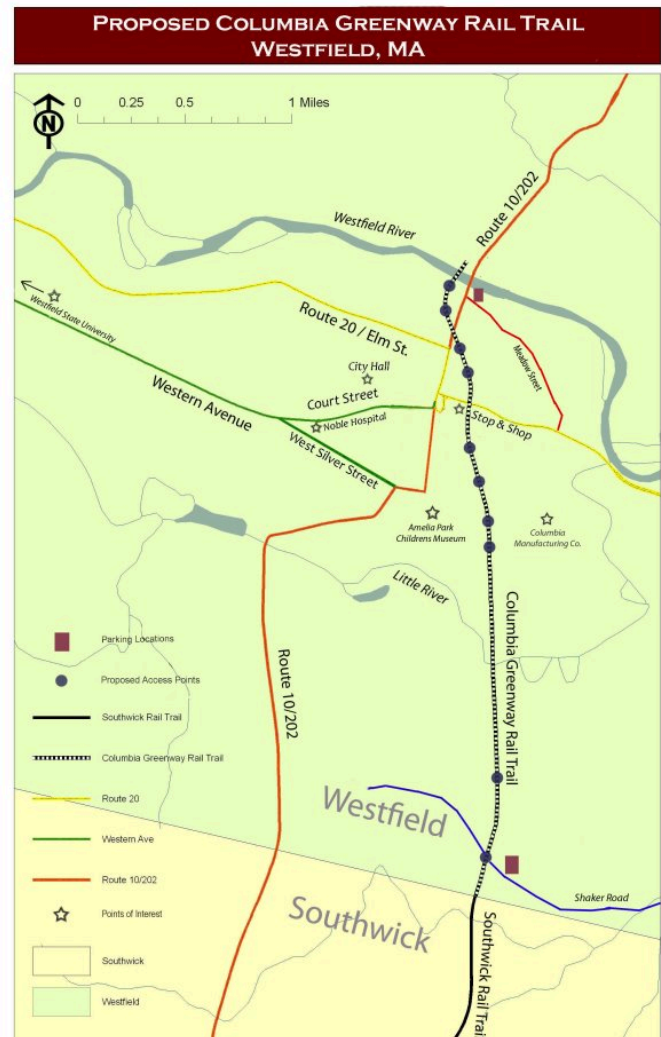
The Pedal Paradise blog has a lovely piece including pictures of the bridges: <http://tinyurl.com/westfieldblog>.

Over the past two years, in addition to establishing articles of incorporation, by-laws, and electing an inaugural board of directors, the Friend of the Columbia Greenway Rail Trail has successfully advocated for the installation of bicycle racks on new Pioneer Valley Transit Authority buses, the installation of share the road signs in Westfield, and the inclusion of the Columbia Greenway Rail Trail as part of the City's Open Space Master Plan.

More recently, the Westfield City Council approved a bond measure to support bringing all three phases to 100% design completion.

In a column published late last year in the *Westfield News*, Westfield Mayor, Daniel Knapik, offered, "financing for the northern leg over the Westfield River is scheduled for funding on the MADOT funding schedule for 2014. The middle leg through town does not have a funding source for construction yet. The southern leg, from Southwick, MA (town line) to Big Y, has most of the design work done. We have been notified by state authorities that there maybe up to \$2 million available for construction on the Southern leg, \$1 million of which we may be able to access. Once we have verification that is the case, it is my intent to put out to bid the leg from the

Southwick line to the Tin Bridge, stopping at the bridge."



Map by Joshua Florence
GARP, Westfield State University April 2011

Construction of phase 1 is about to commence from the Southwick town line and will extend about a mile. The anticipated completion date is June 30, and we look forward to organizing a ride to acquaint people with this exciting new trail.

For additional information, see <http://www.columbiagreenway.org/>. Donations may be sent to: PO Box 595, Westfield, MA 01086-0595.

Leeds Hotel Bridge Fundraising Ride

On Sunday, May 20th, Alice Badecker (860-803-0134, alicebadecker@comcast.net) is helping to coordinate the Leeds Hotel Bridge Ride leaving from the Chartpak building at 1 River Road in Leeds. The Bike Ride will benefit the historic Hotel Bridge in Leeds, MA built in

1880. The bridge is a common pathway used by cyclists to beautiful roads in Western MA. Options include 10, 25, 50 mile supported rides through winding, scenic roadways in Western MA. Registration starts at 7:30 a.m. The cost is \$30.

How to support building more trails

For about a decade, the City of Northampton has received an annual challenge grant to help expand the rail trail network. A donor has pledged \$5,000 each year that we have been able to bring in \$4,000 in outside contributions. Since 2006, the Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways has provided considerable support for this match, and these donations have been instrumental in leveraging over \$15 million dollars and 11 miles of rail trails by providing fund seed money and critical aspects of projects that are required before grant and federal monies can be tapped. Through the FNTG annual appeal, we raised \$5,000 this past year to support these efforts. The donor has made the same pledge this year, and FNTG, in conjunction with the City, are looking for community help again.

It's always good to have a long term goal. It was about a dozen years from the inception of the City's plan to expand rail trails to opening 11 mile of rail trails in the last three years. The plan for the next decade includes a trail from the Norwottuck/Mass Central Rail Trail on Damon Road to Elm Court in Hatfield. We are kicking off the first steps in this very long term project this summer.

We're also working on access ramps to make it easier to connect with these new trails. An access ramp is planned for Edwards Square (hopefully this fall, al-

though it might get put off to 2013), to to King Street at the Bank of America building (date uncertain), as well as a railroad underpass to connect the city's rail trail networks (west side of the railroad) to the state rail trail (east side of the railroad) (2013).

Contributions can be made to the Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways or directly to the City of Northampton. Donations to either entity are tax deductible to the amount allowed by law.

If you are able to donate, please indicate:

1. I want my donation to be used for whatever project has the greatest need.
2. I want my donation to be used to support expansions of the rail trail (new access ramps and new trails)
3. I want my donation to be used to support art and rail trail wayfinding on the Main Street rail trail bridge
4. I want my donation to be used to create a rail trail endowment.

Donations can now be made online using a credit card through our collaboration with JustGive. Information is available on our website: <http://www.fntg.net>.

Main Street improvements

The City of Northampton is kicking off a new project to improve the visibility of the rail trail and encourage Main Street visitors to go explore the trail. We are going to have a combined art and wayfinding installation on the Main Street Rail Trail Bridge. Working with volunteers from the Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways, the City's Bicycle and Pedestrian Subcommittee, and the Ward 1 and Ward 4 City Councilors, they have identified an opportunity to install art on the new

rail trail bridge to help create a wonderful focal point, and include strong wayfinding elements to draw people from the street to the rail trail.

After working with community boards to identify the desired wayfinding elements the Office of Planning and Development chose Sam Ostroff to create this installation. Sam was chosen because of his early concepts (which excited many community members during an earlier Arts Council competition for an art installation on the easterly railroad bridge), because of the design synergy of using the same artist hired by the Gateway

Committee for entranceway signs to the City, and because he could address all of the wayfinding elements brilliantly. The fact that he offered to do the price at significantly below market and take the risks of cost overruns was an added benefit.



Figure : Downtown Northampton: photo credit Mr Weeeee

Pledges and donations for half of the \$34,000 cost have been received, but the project will only proceed when the fundraising campaign is completed (as no City money is going into this project).

There's also work to make Main Street even more pedestrian and bike friendly, building on the official

designation as Bronze level bicycle friendly community by the League for American Bicyclists Bicycle Friendly America program.

After a community transportation charrette led by Nelson/Nygaard, a technical workshop led by the US EPA, and over a dozen public meetings to discuss the City's new Open Space, Recreation, and Multi-Use Rail Trail Plan, the City is working to develop a common recommendation in all of those efforts to examine the width of Main Street to see if changes can be made to increase the amount of on-street parking spots, widen sidewalks, create parklets, and most importantly make Main Street safer.

Although Northampton is very bicycle and pedestrian friendly, the sheer number of these uses and some design challenges in our streets have given us the dubious distinction of having bicycle and pedestrian crash rates downtown that make downtown one of the ten worst crash clusters in the Commonwealth.

This is a very long term project, but over the next few months we are working on some of the lowest hanging fruit, focusing on the intersection of Main Street Cracker Barrel Alley and Crafts Avenue to see if this critical focal point can be improved.

Food Bank to repeat "Will Bike 4 Food"

Last September, the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts held its first ever fundraising bike ride, "Will Bike 4 Food". Participants chose various length routes to ride (25, 50, or 100 miles), and collected donations in support of the Food Bank's mission to combat food insecurity in the region. The 2011 event involved over 100 riders and raised more than \$35,000.

Because of last year's success, the Food Bank will be repeating the event this year. It's scheduled for Saturday, September 15, and in addition to looking for riders, they'll need volunteers to help with registration, staffing rest stops, and helping with the after party.

Details for this year will be posted soon on the Food Bank web site, but you can read informa-

tion on last year's ride at <http://www.foodbankwma.org/events/bike/registration/> and see photos from 2011 at <http://www.foodbankwma.org/events/will-bike-4-food-2011-photos/>.



Figure : Riders from the 2011 fundraiser

The first year's event was a gorgeous way to spend a late summer day, and helped with an important cause in our community. Hopefully the 2012 ride will be even bigger, and you can join it.

Nominations for Trail Neighbor Award

FNTG is soliciting nominations for our 2012 Trail Neighbor Award. This is given annually to an individual, family, or organization that works on behalf of the

Northampton rail trail network. There are lots of ways that many people and institutions support this burgeoning network, and this award lets us publically recognize

those who have played a part. Past recipients include the residents of Six–Eight High Street in Florence, Craig and Kathy Della Penna, the City of Northampton Department of Public Works, and Smith College.

The award will be presented as part of the Bike Week

festivities at the Northampton Bike Breakfast (which runs from 7:00-10:00am on the Courthouse Lawn).

Nominations will be accepted until Saturday, May 5th at 5:00pm by email to 'jriseman@mac.com'.

Upcoming events

Saturday, April 28th *Leeds to Haydenville trail walk*

There will be a trail walk exploring the segment north of Mulberry Street in Leeds heading towards Haydenville on Saturday, April 28th at 9:30am. Meet in the parking lot of the Leeds school for a chance to hear more about this trail and plans for the future.

Tuesday, May 1st (and other Tuesdays) *Tuesday*

evening bike tours Craig Della Penna is organizing a series of bike tours from 5pm until dusk on the first through third Tuesdays in May, June, July and August. For more details and to sign up (fee may apply) see the site <http://www.tuesdayeveningtours.com/biketours.html>.

Saturday, May 5th *Lost Canals of Northampton: Northern segment*

Wayne Feiden, director of the City of Northampton Office of Planning and Development will lead a tour of the northern terminus of the Northampton to New Haven Canal, at the Connecticut River (near River Run). We will meet at 9:00am at the Elwell State Park/Damon Road parking lot, and shuttle over to River Run. Wayne led a walk of the southern part of the canal in the fall which attracted 50 participants. See <http://www.fntg.net> for more details and to sign up.

Sunday, May 6th *Broad Brook Coalition: Enter the Birds*

This beginner bird walk will introduce people to the wonders of birding but will also be of interest to intermediate birders. We'll respond to all birds in the environment, but with an added focus of helping newcomers experience what is often unseen and not heard. Andrew will lead folks down the dirt path/road called Boggy Meadow Road and on to the wildlife blind overlooking the wetlands surrounding the Broad Brook. This is during spring migration so it's a great time for numerous sightings. If time allows we'll also try to make it out to the dam that impounds Fitzgerald Lake. Andrew is a long time birder, and

the illustrator of The Bird Finding Guide to Western Massachusetts. All ages are welcome. Bring binoculars. For more information see <http://www.broadbrookcoalition.org/events>.

Tuesday, May 8th *Bicycle and Pedestrian Subcommittee meeting*

The Northampton Bike/Ped Subcommittee of the Transportation Committee meets from 7:30–8:30am on Tuesday May 8, 2012 (all are welcome; use rear door to access Room 11). Agenda items for the upcoming meeting include an update on ongoing projects (Connecticut River Greenway, Main Street shortened crosswalks/safety and parklets, Beaver Brook Bridge re-pointing, Main Street rail trail bridge artistic wayfinding, Rail Trail kiosks and South Street bicycle lanes). An additional discussion on one way roads for contraflow bicycle travel will be part of the agenda.

Thursday, May 10th *Mill River Greenway annual spring bash*

The annual Spring Bash for the Mill River Greenway will take place from 5:00–7:00pm at Craig Della Penna's Trailside Realty (14 Strong Ave., Northampton). They will be unveiling the results of the Mill River charrette (a set of design ideas) and will have maps, digital displays and a discussion. For more info see <http://millrivergreenway.org/>.

Friday, May 11th *Hidden Mill River in Northampton*

John Sinton and Sky Sutton will lead an hour loop walk from Paradise Pond at Smith College to the Hidden Mill River where it still runs through downtown Northampton. The walk will emphasize the geography of Northampton's early years and will talk about the history of floods on the Mill and Connecticut Rivers. The walk will take place from 4:30-5:30pm. In case of heavy rain we'll reschedule this walk. Please register at info@millrivergreenway.org.

Wednesday, May 16th *Northampton Bike Commute Breakfast*

In addition to organized rides, films and other events, the Northampton Bike Breakfast will be taking place on the Courthouse Lawn. Information on this and other Bike Week events can be found at <http://baystatebikeweek.org/events/>.

Sunday, May 20 *Broad Brook Coalition: Wild Edibles Walk*
Blanche Derby, wild food enthusiast, will lead a leisurely walk where you'll learn about some common plants with culinary and medicinal proper-

ties. Some of these are dismissed because they are commonly thought of as weeds, but you'll discover that they are actually good for something! This walk is mostly stop and start, so it's appropriate for all ages. It should take about 2 hours. Blanche Derby leads edible plant walks all over New England. She has written/illustrated three books and made three films. For more information see <http://www.broadbrookcoalition.org/events>.

Photo and video contest underway

Hampshire County Rail Trails
PHOTO AND VIDEO CONTEST
images and stories that highlight the special qualities of our regional rail trail network

Sponsored by the Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways

Photos and videos should capture the essence of the area's rail trail network and the people who use them, whether it expresses the scenic, recreational, fitness, transportation, creative, ecological, or historical nature of the trails in Hampshire County. Videos that inspire people to use the trails for the first time or educate about trail use and bike safety are especially encouraged.

Winners will be announced in October 2012, and more than \$1,500 in cash prizes will be awarded.

Submissions must be in by the end of August 2012. Judging will be in September 2012 with winners announced and public ceremonies in October 2012.

Please see www.fntg.net/contest for details and official rules

The Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways (FNTG) is sponsoring a photo and video contest of images and stories that highlight the special quality of our regional rail trail network. We encourage you to submit entries that best capture the sense of these trails and the people who use them, throughout all four seasons. Entries should express the scenic, recreational, fitness, transportation, creative, ecological or historical nature of the trails in Hampshire County. Videos that inspire people to use the trails for the first time or educate about trail use and bike safety are especially encouraged.

Finalists will be selected by FNTG, and winners will be determined by a panel of community judges that includes professional photographers, videographers and community members. The winner in each category will receive \$150, second place \$75, and third place \$25. Photos and videos will be judged in the following categories: Professional, Amateur, and Youth. Additional prizes for Best Safety and Best Tourism videos will be offered.

Winners will be decided in September 2012, and more than \$1,500 in cash prizes will be awarded. Winning entries will be displayed at the October Arts Night Out event at Trailside Galleries (14 Strong Avenue, Northampton). More detailed information is available on our website: <http://www.fntg.net/contest>. We look forward to seeing your submissions.

Figure : Poster from the contest