



# 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 8, Fall 2014

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## Updates from the trails

As I write this, Amtrak is preparing to return to Northampton after too long of an absence. I can't wait to take the train to Vermont or New York when it restarts once per day service from Northampton on December 29th. This change is a culmination of a long-overdue upgrade of the tracks and facilities, and should make travel faster and more reliable (and facilitate ecotourism trips utilizing the train or other transit options). Kudos to Mayor Narkewicz, Wayne Feiden and the Office of Planning and Sustainability, the Norwottuck Rail Trail Advisory Committee as well as our state and federal representatives and their staffers.

I'm also looking forward to biking along our "rail with trail" downtown as well as through the new bike and pedestrian underpass, which is scheduled to be installed in 2015. According to Natalie Blais from Representative McGovern's office, the tunnel is designed and paid for. It is a required state match for the federal ARRA funds that were utilized to move the Vermonter over to the west side of the Connecticut River.

Until the underpass is opened, all trail users should travel on the officially designated road connection instead of illegally crossing the tracks. This is important because the trains that will be traveling *much* faster than in previous years. The rail upgrade project contractors will be adding new fences to deter trespassing. The official road detour (on Market Street to North Street) is well-signposted and needs to be the default for all users to ensure safe crossings.

In the past year, there have been wonderful improvements to the trails. The long-awaited rehabilitation of the Norwottuck Rail Trail is almost complete (with the trail officially open from Northampton to Station Road in Amherst). The final component is scheduled to be completed by the late spring of 2015. Kudos to the DCR for the much smoother (glass-free!) surface along with benches, plantings, signage, and other amenities.

We are again working with our partners at the Friends of the Manhan Rail Trail to reprint our popular trail map and brochure. If you have suggestions of businesses who might be willing to sponsor an ad, please let us know.

The Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways continues to work with the City of Northampton to help design, build, maintain, and improve the local trail network. We're most appreciative of the city's new kiosks (funded by a grant proposal that we wrote with the City and MassBike), the adopt-a-trail program (see related article), and land acquisitions (see related article). There are also exciting developments in Williamsburg (see related article), as well as efforts to build out the trail to Boston (see related article), and down to New Haven (with trail projects underway in Westfield).

As always, we value your continued support. Since 2006, the Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways has provided donations of more than \$30,000 which have leveraged over \$15 million dollars and 11 miles of rail trails. Through the FNTG annual appeal, we raised

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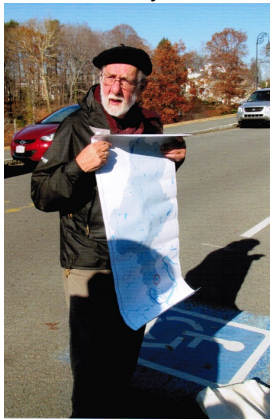
\$5,000 this past year to support efforts to improve trail signage, to match state funding, and to plug gaps in the local trail network. We hope that you are able to support

this future work.

*Nicholas Horton, President*

## Mill River Greenway Tours

Did you know that since 1666 there has been a dam below what is now Paradise Pond, installed a mere 12 years after Northampton's founding in 1654? Or that Native Americans cultivated the land which is now the Smith College soccer field, land now covered with fake grass? Or that you can see remnants of the old Mill River bed next to the bike trail near Veteran's Field? (The Mill River was diverted to its present bed in 1940.) These are just some of the facts a group of us learned as we joined John Sinton on a history walk organized by volunteers from the Mill River Greenway Initiative.



John Sinton of the Mill River Greenway Initiative describing river history on a map

Other recent tours have included the River Walk and Art Installation, which featured a series of "flotsam weirs," or interwoven nets of Mill River flotsam that lead the walker down through the peninsula created by the

East and West Branch of the Mill at their confluence in Williamsburg.

In September, Heidi Stevens and Jason Johnson, founders of the Mill River Greenway Committee of the Leeds Civic Association, led a tour that focused on the heyday of Leeds during the first three-quarters of the 19th century, with stops at the Old Nonotuck Woolen Mill and 3 other mill sites, the old post office and train depot, the Dimock mansion, the Hotel Bridge, and the memorial to the 1874 Flood that devastated Leeds. Despite the light rain, about 20 people attended. One commented that the soft light of the grey sky actually enhanced the beauty of the woods on this beautiful section of the trail. The walk crossed the stone bridge over Beaver Brook, several locations of vernal pools, and explored and discussed the proposed connection to South Main Street from the end of the public accessible rail bed, where trail users will be able to continue biking or walking into Haydenville.

Another walk from Crimson & Clover Farm on Spring St. to the Meadow St. Bridge combined historic and ecological information. Laurie Sanders spoke about Mill River ecology as we traveled along the river corridor, and Elizabeth Sharpe (author of "In the Shadow of the Dam") discussed the dramatic results of the 1874 Flood, which ended at what is now the farm and recreational fields in Florence.

The Mill River Greenway Initiative is a volunteer organization, whose activities and accomplishments depend on the interests and energy of its members. More information can be found at <http://millrivergreenway.org>.

## Golden Spike Event

On April 12, a Golden Spike event was held in Clinton, MA for the Mass Central Rail Trail (MCRT). The event was organized by Craig Della Penna of Florence, and was the fourth such event held for the MCRT. Representatives from various sections of the statewide trail came to present up-to-date information on what stage each section is in, awards were given to some important individuals in the history of the trail, and DCR Commissioner Jack Murray gave a keynote speech about trail

efforts by the Commonwealth.

Attendees gathered in a banquet room at Clinton's Old Timer Restaurant to hear the section-by-section updates. First was Alan Moore, co-chair of the Community Path in Somerville, talking about the portion in Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville. It's a total of six miles through the three cities, roughly following the Green Line train, and nearly 2/3 of it is expected to be complete by the end of 2014.

John Dieckmann, co-chair of the Belmont Rail Trail

Advisory Committee, noted that a small section, 660 feet, is complete in that city. The entire Belmont section is planned, but at one point the trail will have the challenge of squeezing past a building. The committee is looking at two possible routes around this obstacle.

The Wayside segment runs 23 miles from Waltham to Berlin, and is proceeding to permitting and design, according to section chair Larry Kiernan. Much of this section will provide an important pedestrian alternative to the busy highways with no sidewalks in the 6 towns.



A tunnel entrance on the Mass Central Rail Trail in Clinton

In Clinton, there is existing trail open by the Wachusett Reservoir, on land controlled by DCR. Fran- nie Hodge of the Clinton Greenway Conservation Trust detailed ongoing work to purchase land in the eastern

## Trail Extension

The City has recently received grants from the National Park Service and the Northampton Community Preservation Committee to design and construct an extension of the MassCentral Rail-Trail one-third of a mile

part of town near the Berlin line. The path that the trail will take to access Sterling to the west has yet to be determined.

Colleen Abrams, President of the Wachusett Greenways, spoke about the existing stonedust trail which covers 19 miles from Sterling to Oakham.

The East Quabbin area has two miles of its MCRT segment completed, in Hardwick and New Braintree. Cynthia Henshaw, the Executive Director of the East Quabbin Land Trust, gave details on the open portion and talked about the corridor in Ware.

Andy Morris-Friedman of the Norwottuck Rail Trail Advisory Committee prepared slides showing DCR's reconstruction project on that Valley trail, but was unable to attend the event himself. Della Penna and I spoke about the reconstruction and the future tunnel in Northampton that would link the state-run trail with the municipal ones west of the Connecticut River.

The section presentations were followed by Commissioner Murray's keynote address on the partnerships between the state and various groups on trails. Murray spoke about the fact that the effort is "trans-generational", but that things are moving much more quickly than in the past. He mentioned that the state has spent more money on trails in the past five years than it had in the previous three decades, and he urged all interested parties to keep the pressure on with a new administration in place next year. The DCR's Recreation Chief Gary Briere followed up with more specific info on collaborations between local groups and DCR.

Afterward, the Clinton Trust members invited participants to tour the railway tunnel which will become part of the trail yet to be built. Several of us entered the tunnel from its western end by route 62, while others made their way there from the east. The latter approach was a bit wet, but several people were able to navigate their way through. The tunnel itself had some dripping water and puddles (and ice remaining from the winter), but had plenty of dry footing.

Presentation slides on the different sections of the trail can be viewed online at the MCRT web site: <http://www.masscentralrailtrail.org/townbytown.html>

*Sean Kinlin*

northerly from the Grove Avenue access in Leeds to a point about halfway to the Williamsburg line.

On Monday October 6th, about 40 members of the community joined Wayne Feiden, Director of Planning and Sustainability, and Jesse Moreno, the project engi-



neer, to walk this section of the trail and help identify problems that need to be addressed in the engineering design phase of the project. Among the items discussed were drainage problems, non-native invasive plants, the possible need for fences in areas of steep drop-offs, and the number and positioning of interpretive signs. Also discussed were options for the trail surface, ranging from asphalt (preferred by many bikers) to trap-rock gravel (preferred by many walkers) and various combinations of the two. Moreno was charged with generating a report giving the advantages, disadvantages, and cost of each option, which will inform future discussions and the final decision.



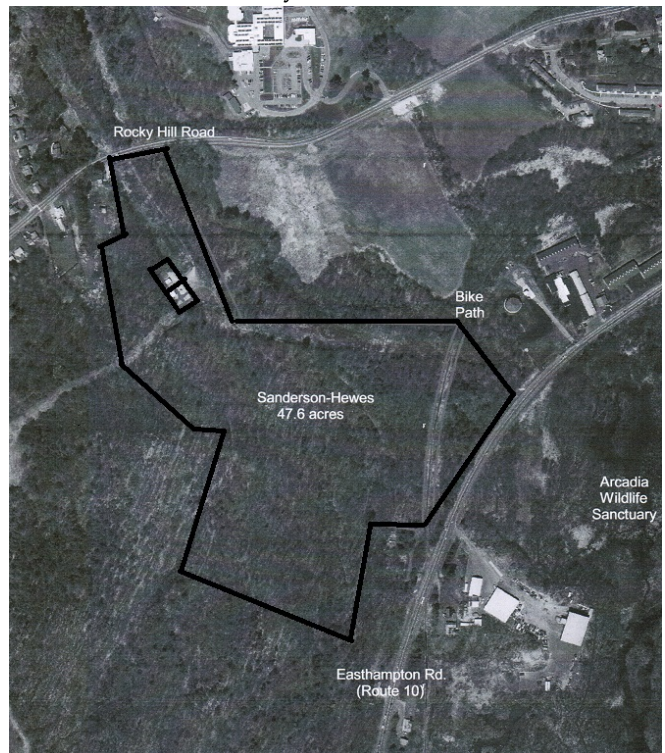
Announcement of grants to fund trail projects in Williamsburg

On October 17, in a special event in Northampton, the Patrick Administration announced \$1.1 million in grants to fund 39 trails projects across the Commonwealth. The Town of Williamsburg received a grant of \$48,000 (matched locally with \$72,000) for improvements to the section of the existing Leeds-to-Haydenville trail from the Northampton-Williamsburg town line to South Main Street. The project includes engineering design, grading/drainage work, and trail resurfacing. The grant will also address existing concerns with car traffic, poor visibility, and surface water at the foot of South Main Street where Williamsburg expects increased bike and pedestrian traffic due to these trail improvements.

The Cutchins Program for Children and Families received a grant of \$16,700 (which was matched locally with \$14,417) to expand and develop a trail system in the City-owned Meadows floodplain area. It will add

an additional 2.5 miles of trail including a half mile that will be ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) accessible. The project will also involve: construction of trail entry signs, benches, and a series of interpretive signs; ongoing maintenance of existing trails; and restoration effects focused on removing invasive species.

In October the City completed purchase of a 46-acre plot in the southwestern part of Northampton (see map) which will, in time, allow a multiuse trail connection between Route 66 in the Rocky Hill area, including the Ice Pond Trail, to the Manhan Trail near the bridge across Route 10. The trail will pass through what is likely to become known as the Rocky Hill Greenway, a critical wildlife corridor, and is the first link in a plan to connect the entire western half of the City to the trail system. The city just opened four bids for engineering services to design the trail and they expect to award that engineering contract before the end of the year. It could still be six to ten years before the full trail is built, but it is proceeding. The purchase was made possible through CPA (Community Preservation Act) funding, support from the Massachusetts Audubon Society, and private donations, including support from the Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways.



Map of newly purchased 46-acre plot (Rocky Hill Greenway)

## Winner of Trail Neighbor Award

Anyone who is the least interested or involved in the cycling scene in the Valley has probably gotten an e-mail at some point from James Lowenthal.



James Lowenthal in academic garb

As the president of the Pioneer Valley chapter of the Massachusetts Bicycle Coalition (MassBike) for the last

several years, James is constantly gathering and disseminating information on important news and opportunities for action on cycling-related infrastructure, policies, and other projects. MassBikePV is additionally involved in many bicycle outreach activities each year, especially during Bay State Bike Week, and James is a major organizer and volunteer for such events.

James also serves as a member of the Bicycling and Pedestrian Subcommittee of the Northampton Transportation and Parking Commission, writes frequent letters and opeds in local media, and does other public and behind-the-scenes work to advocate for the rights and interests of cyclists. He often urges others to attend public forums or write to representatives in government, but he also "walks the walk", serving as a prominent voice himself at every such opportunity. We are happy to honor his long service to the community by recognizing him as our 2014 Trail Neighbor of the year.

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, Smith College, Jane Sommer, and Julia Riseman. Nominations for the 2015 award will be solicited in the spring, and awarded at the Northampton Bike Breakfast.

## Adopt-a-trail program



Adopt-a-trail sign in Northampton

The City of Northampton has created an Adopt-a-Trail program for all City rail trails. Volunteers, individuals or groups, are responsible for a short segment

of the trails and engage in simple tasks such as litter cleanup and cutting brush behind guard rails, items that the Department of Public Works cannot do as often as is needed to maintain the trails at their best. Announced in February, the program has already signed up volunteers and business sponsors to cover 17 of the 26 trail segments in the program. Segments that remain to be covered are primarily those farthest from the City center, on the Manhan Trail towards Easthampton and the Mass Central Trail from Leeds towards Williamsburg.

Sponsors include the Northampton DPW, Planning and Parking offices, Tom Riddell, Smith College, the Unitarian Society, Felix Lufkin and Help Yourself, Collaborative for Education Services, Adam Cohen and Jendi Reiter, A2Z Science and Learning Store, Valley Time Trade, Pedal People, John McGrath, Esther Ralston, Suzanne Love, Guys Tours of Florence, Look Park, Suzanne Starling, Leeds Elementary School, David Paine, and VCA, Inc.

More information about the new program can be found at <http://www.northamptonma.gov/1372/Adopt-a-Trail>.



## Secretary's Corner

The City has recently placed boxes for distribution of trail maps on several of the informational kiosks along the trails, and is looking for volunteers to take responsibility for replenishing the map supply. If you live near one of these kiosks and are interested in taking on this task, please contact the Director Planning and Sustainability, Wayne Feiden, at [wfeiden@northamptonma.gov](mailto:wfeiden@northamptonma.gov) or (413) 587-1265.

We are once again joining with other nonprofits in the Pioneer Valley for Valley Gives, a 24-hour celebration of giving to be held on December 10. Not able to participate on December 10? Gifts made as early as Monday, December 1 may be scheduled to be effective on Valley Gives Day, December 10; go to the FNTG Valley Gives page at <http://www.razoo.com/story/Friends-Of-Northampton-Trails-And-Greenways> and click on the Donate box. Already donated this year? Visit the FNTG Valley Gives page anyway. Perhaps you'll be inspired to give a little extra to support our work.



Signs along the trail

Members may have noticed that most of our communications are now being sent via the MailChimp bulk

email service. This service uses our mailing list to generate individual emails to each of you, which reduces the chances of them being snagged by spam filters. But beware: if you forward the email to a friend, and the friend should click the "unsubscribe" button at the bottom, it is you who will be unsubscribed, not the friend. I will try to contact each "unsubscribed" member to make sure the request is deliberate, but a better way to inform your friends of FNTG activities is to copy the content of the email and paste it into a new message of your own.

We have no email address for the following members:

Anne McNeill  
 F.J. Rogers Co.  
 Murphy's Realtors  
 Barbara and Joseph Blumenthal  
 Kathy Service  
 Pamela Schwartz and Joel Feldman  
 Ben Westbrook  
 Linda and Silas Kopf  
 Peter Whalen and Janna Ugone  
 Benita Jackson and Samuel Ruhmkorff  
 Lyn Lemaire  
 Ron Ackerman and Cleo Gorman  
 Bill Arnold  
 Mary Grimm  
 Ruth Griggs  
 Cecilia Martyn  
 Michele and Michael Marotta  
 Shelly Lake  
 Ellie and Peter Shelburne  
 Mona Sprecker  
 Stuart Johnstone

Please send us your email address if you have one. Although we will continue to send notices to you via postal mail if necessary, it would help reduce our administrative expenses if we could contact you electronically. If you no longer wish to be a Member of FNTG, please inform us, and we will take you off our mailing list.

*John Gaustad*

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