

Rail-trail plans moving forward in Norton

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Norton — Since March, a group of volunteers have been working on extending the World War II Memorial Trail in Mansfield through the town of Norton.

Last month Norton selectmen voted and approved the formation of the town-sanctioned Alternative Transportation Committee.

The newly formed group can now determine what needs to be accomplished in order to make the rail trail project a reality.

The committee is made up of seven Norton residents — Karen Kenter, Sandra Ollerhead, Denny Goodrich, Kathleen Ebert-Zawasky, Linda Kollet, Don Cybulski and Scott Holman.

By becoming an official town committee, the group can now apply for state grants in order cover some of the costs involved with the project, Kenter said.

The committee is currently working with the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economical Development District (SRPEDD) to determine what grant money is available.

“The grants aren’t written yet,” Ollerhead said. “But we are looking at grants to cover the initial study, and grants for the whole (construction) of the project.”

Until a study is performed, it is unclear what the project will cost, Kenter said.

If funding is available, the plan is to add four additional miles onto the two-mile paved trail in Mansfield. The trail will pick up in Mansfield on Fruit Street and run along the old WWII Memorial railroad trail through Norton until it reaches the Taunton border.

The trail will consist of a 10- to 12-foot wide, multi-use path next to a five-foot-wide unpaved equestrian trail, Kenter said.

Ollerhead said the committee is also reaching out to both Norton and Mansfield residents for feedback on the project.

Thirteen years ago when Mansfield installed its bike path, Norton rejected the proposal to have the path extend into town.

Kenter said, at the time, town officials were concerned with safety, especially where the trail will cross on Rte. 123 and Washington Street.

““They didn’t think it could be done anyway without any accidents,” Kenter said.

Others who opposed the project were dirt bike riders. They didn’t want to see the rough terrain where they ride to become paved, Kenter said. But their reasoning wasn’t valid, she said.

“They aren’t supposed to be out there anyway,” Kenter said.

Because the trail will run along the Mansfield sewer line, Ollerhead said getting Mansfield officials on board is key. She said she has spoken with Mansfield Director of Public Works Lee Azinheria and received his support.

“He has been so positive about it,” she said. “He thinks it will be a great asset for the town.”

Ollerhead said both Mansfield and Norton residents are welcome to attend the Alternative Transportation Committee meetings as they work through the process, because the trail extension affects both towns.

“We encourage Mansfield people to join because its on Mansfield land and we obviously want their support,” she said. “We welcome Mansfield residents to come and share their experiences.”

Both women explained why they have opted to serve on the committee.

“It would be nice for the community to have this,” Kenter said. “Especially those with no children. There are no recreational activities where older people can go and bond in town. This potentially benefits everybody. If you are mobile you can use it.”

Ollerhead, who has two children, Emma, 10, and Jake, 7, said it was important for her to have a safe place for her children to ride their bikes or go for a walk in town.

“There is no place to run, except for the track (at Norton High School). This would provide a safe place to walk and hang out, it would be nice to have that option and have a place to go to get out and moving,” she said.

To spread awareness of the project, the committee is also hosting a Norton Rail Trail scavenger hunt. Residents in Norton and surrounding towns are encouraged to participate, Ollerhead said. The contest runs now through Oct. 31.

Participants are asked to look for items on the old railroad bed from Johnson Woods to Cobb Street in Norton and along the WWII Memorial Trail in Mansfield. A list of items and an explanation of rules can be found at <http://nortonrailtrail.weebly.com/photo-scavenger-hunt.html>.

Prizes include a \$50 Amazon gift card.

For more information about the rail trail project and the Norton Alternative Transportation committee visit,

<https://www.facebook.com/NortonRailTrail>.

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