

STREET BEAT: Revisiting the path in Norton

BY PAIGE ALLEN SUN CHRONICLE STAFF | Posted: Sunday, October 20, 2013 11:30 pm

NORTON - Plans for a bike path in town were shot down about a decade ago, but a group of residents has brought them back to life.

In March, the group came together with the hopes of making the multi-use path a reality in Norton.

The residents started meeting as an unofficial group, then became an official town committee last month. The newly formed Alternative Transportation Committee

consists of seven Norton residents: Sandra Ollerhead, Karen Kenter, Linda Kollet, Denny Goodrich, Kathleen Ebert-Zawasky, Don Cybulski and Scott Holman.

The proposed trail is still in preliminary planning and design phases, but the group is planning for the trail to include a 10- to 12-foot wide multi-use path and a separate 5-foot wide unpaved equestrian trail.

Goodrich said the group has been focused on gathering support for the trail and getting word out about the project.

"We're really gaining momentum and we have hundreds of supporters for it," he said.

The Norton Rail Trail Facebook page the group started has more than 450 likes.

To help get information out about the trail, the group is putting on a photo scavenger hunt during the month of October. The objects to be photographed are found on sections from the Johnson and Henrich Woods across from 107 North Washington Street to Cobb Street and the World War II Memorial Trail in Mansfield. The list of items to be photographed and entry rules can be found on the groups website, nortonrailtrail.weebly.com.

Goodrich said one of the goals of completing the almost four-mile stretch in Norton is to connect to the existing trail in Mansfield, and potentially in Taunton.

"The Norton piece is really the missing link," he said. "If we can connect to the trail in Mansfield that will mean over six miles of path."

Ollerhead, who was voted chairwoman of the committee at the group's first meeting as an official town committee Wednesday, said the group is working with the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economical Development District to apply for federal and state grants for funding for the project.

Ollerhead said she got involved with the project because she wanted a safe place for her kids to ride their bikes.

"I have a 7- and a 10-year-old and we would go to bike paths in Rhode Island and Cape Cod, but by the time we loaded up the bikes and got to where we were going we would spend more time in the car than anywhere else," she said.

Kenter, who was elected vice chairwoman of the committee, lives near an entrance to the trail on North Washington Street, and said she was interested in the project the last time around.

"My son really missed out on all of the advantages it would have provided. Living on a busy street, it would have been really nice to have it," she said.

Kenter said she thinks the trail will be something to bring the community together.

"I think it will be really good for the town and the community. It's something for kids and adults, walkers, bikers and horseback riders. It wouldn't exclude anybody," she said.

Kenter and Ollerhead said they have mostly received support for the project, although some people who live along the path have expressed concern.

"The majority of people are for it and like the idea of the path, but there's just general concern and they want their input heard," Ollerhead said.

"People get nervous about change and they wonder how it's going to affect them," Kenter said. "They want to be part of the whole thing and not feel like it's being done to them."

The committee is planning to hold an informative meeting for abutters of the path in December to address any concerns homeowners might have.

"North and South Washington Streets aren't good streets to walk or bike on because they're just too busy. For those living on the path, they would be able to just walk out of their yard and walk and bike," Kenter said.

Kenter and Ollerhead said dirt bikes frequently rip through the trail, and the loud noise they make has upset some of the abutters to the path.

"Some people are supportive of the path because they're hoping the trail will get rid of the dirt bikes," Kenter said.