



# Norton explores extending Mansfield rail trail

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**Wicked Local Norton**

Posted May 09, 2013 @ 01:33 PM  
Last update May 09, 2013 @ 02:20 PM

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Norton — More than a decade ago, Norton considered converting old railroad tracks into a bike path but residents rejected the idea.

Recently, a handful of Norton residents approached the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD) and Town Manager Michael Yunits to revisit the project.

“I think this would be a really great opportunity for the town to have a nice recreational path that would be family-friendly and could also be used for commuting by bike to the Mansfield train station,” said Adam Recchia of SRPEDD.

A committee of Norton residents is currently working with

Norton considered creating a bike path when neighboring towns considered the idea in the late 1990s.

In 1998, Mansfield voters approved the design at Town Meeting. The Massachusetts Highway Department awarded the funding and the town hired Development Director Shaun Burke.

The Mansfield World War II Memorial Trail was completed in 2002.

“We had people using the bike path while it was under construction,” Burke said. “In general the bike path has had wide use.”

Ten years later, the bike path in Mansfield is busy as ever, with people walking, jogging, riding horses, skateboarding, rollerblading and biking.

Mansfield resident Laura Wellman said she walks on it every day.

“It is nice,” she said. “I like to have it in town.”

Wellman said she often brings her children to the path to play.

“It is safer than being on the streets,” Wellman said.

Fellow Mansfield resident Cassie Friedman also said she has used the path for months and plans to use it more.

“I love the bike path,” Friedman said. “My son can ride his bike on the streets and I at the same time can walk my daughter in her stroller.”

In Norton, many are hoping the tide has turned and residents will use the path more.

“It was supposed to be built then, along with the Mansfield trail, but there was some opposition from residents and some town officials,” Recchia said.

Lisa Nastar of Norton said she drives to Mansfield to use the trail.

“I feel it brings more of a sense of community to a town where people can share,” Nastar said.

Samantha Lawson of Mansfield, who uses the current path for both walking and riding bikes, said she would like to see the path extended, that there are areas where bikers have to cross through parking lots and it isn't safe.

“We wish it was longer,” Lawson said.

If Norton does install the path, Lawson will get her wish.

The Norton bike path would be an extension of the Mansfield one, running along Fruit Street, then returning to the sewer right-of-way until it meets I-495 where it would use a short section of North Washington Street and Cobb Street to get over the highway before returning to the right-of-way, Recchia said.

“The exact routing is still subject to change though since this is very preliminary at this point,” he said.

If the path does come to Norton, it would serve the same purpose it does in Mansfield and be used for non-motorized activity, including biking, walking, rollerblading, dog walking, and stroller pushing would ideal uses for the path, Recchia said.

“It would be a safe place for recreation and would be family-friendly since the majority of it would be off-road,” he said. “It could also include a horse trail alongside it just like the Mansfield path has now.”

Because of its background, the route once transported World War II troops from Boston, Recchia said the path could also be used as a history trail.

There are the obvious health benefits as well, Recchia said.

“It would allow for healthy and active transportation to flourish in the town, having a potential impact on public health,” he said.

For more information visit <https://sites.google.com/site/nortonrailtrail/>.



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