

Mansfield holds off on signs

BY RICK FOSTER / SUN CHRONICLE STAFF | Posted: Thursday, October 28, 1999 12:00 am

MANSFIELD — The town is reviewing alternatives to posting “no trespassing” signs along a five-mile rail trail in Norton after a resident complained the signs would inflame tensions between the two communities.

David Hammond of Branch Street said a plan by Town Manager John D'Agostino to post the signs along the town-owned right of way might not help preserve town property rights and could worsen relations between neighbors already strained over a proposed hiking trail.

“I think you'd be ratcheting up animosity between the two towns,” said Hammond, who suggested that the trail be posted instead as property of the town of Mansfield. D'Agostino announced plans recently to post the signs in order to safeguard property rights from neighbors, some of whom have encroached on the line by expanding their yards or placing sheds on the right of way. Unless the town takes some steps to assert its ownership, he said, abutters might gain control of the land.

Mansfield had obtained a grant to create a six-mile-long, multi-use trail along the former railroad line, most of which is located in Norton. But Norton dropped out of the plan after some of its residents complained and costs increased far beyond the original \$500,000 estimate.

Selectmen Chairwoman Dianne Royle said she agrees with Hammond and said the town should explore all options. Town Counsel Robert Mangiaratti said it is possible neighbors could obtain rights over town property through continuous use over a 20-year period under a legal concept known as adverse possession.

If the town does post signs, however, it would have to take steps to to move abutters off the property in order for its rights to be fully protected.

Other options are also available, Mangiaratti said, including allowing neighbors to use the land with the specific understanding that the town retains rights to the land.

D'Agostino said previously that the town planned to install the signs and would rely on Norton police to enforce them.

Norton Police Chief Bruce Finch said his department would be limited to responding to specific complaints, however.