

Rail Trail Advisory Committee Charge

The process of converting the abandoned Mass Central Rail Line, a 3 mile section of which bisects Weston, to a rail trail (or greenway) has been gaining momentum since 2011 when the MBTA signed a 99 year lease with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation giving DCR jurisdiction over the Massachusetts Central Railroad line. The initial focus of DCR's efforts to convert the unused rail line to a trail has been the proposed Wayside Branch ("MCRT-WB"), a 23 miles stretch that runs from Waltham to Berlin and includes a 3 mile stretch running through Weston from Waltham to Wayland. In 2013 MEPA granted DCR a waiver from filing a full Environmental Impact Report clearing the way for design and construction to commence. In 2014 DCR developed specifications for the rail trail and, with limited state funding available, DCR began encouraging local communities to fund the construction. In 2015 Wayland's Annual Town Meeting appropriated \$445,000 to support the construction of the 3 mile rail trail within Wayland's borders. (This town appropriation supplemented a \$290,000 commitment from the developers of Wayland Town Center and other private donations. The estimated cost, excluding a potential bridge replacement was \$240,000 per mile.)

Meanwhile, Eversource, which maintains power lines along the right-of-way, is preparing to conduct major work to improve access and upgrade its electrical lines in 2016 along the right-of-way. Eversource has a non-exclusive easement to maintain their power towers and the electrical lines that lie along portions of the MCRT-WB in Weston, Wayland Sudbury and Berlin. Eversource is set to commence work in 2016 in Sudbury on the MCRT-WB right of way which will, in addition to upgrading the electrical lines, remove the rails and ties and create a 10-foot-wide gravel drive for periodic use by the Eversource's maintenance equipment. This same scope of work is expected to start in Weston later this year.

Given this activity and the inevitability of a rail trail in Weston, the Board of Selectmen proposes to form a Weston Rail Trail Committee which will be charged as follows:

- 1) Incorporate community outreach, especially from abutters, for input on concerns about impacts and suggestions for the design;
- 2) Meet with Eversource to advocate for the surfacing and other options that optimize Weston's future decisions.
- 3) Develop a scope of work and a budget for surfacing, road and rail crossings and landscaping design work after Eversource has completed the access road and, with the Board of Selectmen, seek CPA funding for this task.
- 4) Review the design guidelines provided by DCR and recommend the options that best fit our community (Wayland has opted for a compacted stone dust surface while the sections already completed in Waltham are asphalt);
- 5) Consider how the connections with the rail trail built in our neighboring communities of Waltham and Wayland will work most effectively for Weston;
- 6) Consider how to manage the cost and completion of the most expensive portions of the future trail – the existing bridge over the Fitchburg line on Weston's eastern border and the Conant Road underpass which is filled with soil that is a structural part of the bridge itself.
- 7) Consider where user parking might fit to minimize the traffic and neighborhood impacts;
- 8) Consider how access to our town trails and open space should be managed to minimize potential damage to sensitive ecosystems;

- 9) Consider how the rail trail could support and enhance bicycle and pedestrian safety and recreational access in Weston.
- 10) Consider how the rail trail could improve access to transportation hubs and rail connections planned by the Commonwealth.
- 11) Consider an implementation timetable.
- 12) Report to the Selectmen

The committee is to be comprised of 7 voting members:

- 1) A representative of the Conservation Commission;
- 2) A representative of the Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee;
- 3) A representative of the Traffic and Sidewalk Committee;
- 4) A representative from Weston Forest and Trails
- 5) Board of Selectmen's Appointee
- 6) Board of Selectmen's Appointee
- 7) Board of Selectmen's Appointee

From DCR's report on the Wayside Trail:

Conditions / Standards for Development

- Path development must follow DEP best practices for Rail Trail development
- Path surface must meet ADA / AAB standards for firm and stable
- Road crossings must meet AASHTO and MUTC guidelines for safe crossings
- Procurements must follow applicable state procurement laws for horizontal construction
- Appropriate community outreach and abutter communication
- Appropriate drainage planning
- Obtain applicable wetlands and MESA and historic permits