



FRIENDS OF THE BRUCE FREEMAN RAIL TRAIL

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Friends of the BFRT Annual Meeting

When: Sunday, November 20, 2 pm

Where:

**Minute Man Arc - Carter Building
 1269 Main Street (Rt. 62)
 West Concord**

Join us to:

- Hear town updates
- Partake of light refreshments
- Walk a cleared section of the trail for
 Beautiful views of the Assabet River

The Carter Building is across from the Harvey Wheeler Community Center in West Concord.

Friends Meet With State Agency, Discuss Five-Mile Extension of Rail Trail and Removal of Rails and Ties

On October 20th members of the Board of the Friends met with officials from the Mass Executive Office of Transportation (EOT) to discuss extending the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail from Route 20 in Sudbury to Route 9 in Framingham and removing rails and ties from the Phase 2 corridor prior to construction of the rail trail.

The first 20 miles of the BFRT right-of-way is owned by EOT. The final 5 miles of the right-of-way is owned by CSX Transportation, which is interested in selling it. The Friends proposed that EOT acquire the 5-mile corridor, so the entire 25 mile right-of-way from Lowell to Framingham would be owned and controlled by one entity, simplifying the proposed conversion to a rail trail.

Based on the current market price for surplus rail, it is estimated that the rail and ties could now be removed from the Phase 2 corridor at a positive cash flow. This is in direct contrast to cost estimates provided in the Acton and Concord rail trail feasibility studies. The consultants projected that

removal of rails and ties for the two towns would cost over \$2.6 million, based upon historical cost estimates. The Friends proposed that EOT undertake to sell the rails and ties now and lock in today's high prices for surplus rail, thus saving the towns millions of dollars in their projected construction budgets.

It is too early to determine if the state would purchase the 5-mile corridor or attempt to sell the rails and ties on the right-of-way. However, the EOT officials received the proposals with interest. The next step is to meet with the Deputy Secretary for Transportation and convince him to take action on the proposals. We will keep you posted on our progress.

Time to Join or Renew?

Your membership in the Friends is critical to our success. Unless your address label has "06" next to your name, it is time to join the Friends or renew your membership for 2006. Please return the membership form found on Page 4 along with your check. Also, indicate if you would prefer to receive future newsletters via e-mail and be sure to include your e-mail address. Thanks for your support!

The Value of a Nearby Rail Trail

Sometimes people wonder if building a rail trail affects the value of near-by properties. The Friends asked local realtors for their opinions and found that a rail trail is seen as a very positive addition to a neighborhood. The realtors stated that homes near trails tend to sell faster and for less of a discount from their asking prices than homes further away. According to a 2000 survey by the National Association of Homebuilders, one of the most desired amenities (52%) was a nearby walking or jogging trail. For those with annual incomes greater than \$75,000, this percentage increased to 65%.

Finally, the Friends searched a recent realtors database for this area and found nearly 400 listings that made references to trails. Very typical were the following comments in the remarks section of the listing: **Marlboro**: "Close to downtown, easy access to major routes, near park and bike trail"; **Ayer**: "Located near easy access to great outdoors Rail Trail"; **Marlboro**: "You have direct access to the new rail trail"; **Pepperell**: "Close to Route 113 shopping, downtown and the rail trail"; **Lexington**: "Move right in and enjoy easy access to Sutherland Park, stores, bike path and Alewife bus." In summary, trails are an important selling point and they add value to a property.

Check out our updated website!

www.brucefreemanrailtrail.org



Phase 1 Update - Lowell, Chelmsford and Westford

Phase 1 of the BFRT, from Lowell through Chelmsford and Westford to Route 225, is being redesigned by Holden Engineering (who did the original design), due to concerns by Mass Highway over the possibility of fly ash in the soil. The hope is that the redesigned rail trail will be approved quickly and go out for construction bids in the next few months, so that Phase 1 construction could begin in Spring 2006. The Westford Parks & Recreation Commission will be discussing the BFRT at their November meeting.

The Friends held their monthly meeting October 19th at the Parkerville Schoolhouse in Westford. Scott Walker, Transportation/Land Use Planner of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) was the guest speaker. Scott explained how rail trail projects become eligible for the 90% match in Federal and state funds. He also spoke of a "new day" at Mass Highway, where the standards for new rail trail projects will be more flexible and more community input will be sought. Regarding the Westford segment of the BFRT (south of Route 225) that was not included in Phase 1, Scott explained several options for funding, including having it set up as a separate project, or possibly being funded 100% by Westford because of its relatively low cost. Please call Emily Teller at 978-692-6968 if you have any questions or want to volunteer to help.

Acton Update - Town Works on Legislation Limiting Rail Trail Liability, Selectmen Give Approval for CPA Application for 25% Design Funds, Friends Conduct Trail Clearing

At the April 2005 Town Meeting, \$75,000 of Community Preservation Act (CPA) funding was approved to begin negotiations for a lease of the BFRT right of way with the Mass Executive Office of Transportation (EOT), the owners of the corridor. Since April, the Town has been working on legislation which would limit liability and provide insurance associated with "Brownfield Development" of a rail trail. This legislation is very important because it affects the Town's willingness to sign a lease with EOT for the right of way, due to the possibility of being subject to hazardous waste remediation costs.

At the request of the Acton Friends, the Board of Selectmen gave their approval on October 19 for Town Staff to work on obtaining CPA funding for the "25% Design" of the rail trail. The Town must now submit an application by the November 14 deadline, obtain approval from the Community Preservation Committee and approval from voters at the April 2006 Town Meeting.

The Acton Friends have been active, hosting informational tables at Acton Day on September 15 and West Acton Oktoberfest on October 1. Fifty new supporters were recruited at these two events.

On October 22nd the Acton Friends and Pedal Power Bike and Ski hosted a Trail Clearing/Clean-Up Day on the BFRT right of way. Friends members including Tom Michelman, Rebecca Nile-Peretz, Antonio Santoro, Jim Snyder-Grant and Joyce Reischutz planned and coordinated the trail clearing. Starting at Pedal Power, over 40 volunteers cleared a jungle-like morass into a twelve foot wide trail almost to Concord Road,

one-half mile to the south. The event was a great success not only due to the volunteers' efforts, but also to the many supporters and sponsors. They included the Town of Acton, particularly Don Johnson - Town Manager, Tom Tidman - Natural Resources Director, Peter Ashton and Walter Foster - Board of Selectmen, Jim Snyder-Grant - Land Stewardship Committee, Andy Magee - Conservation Commission, and Stephen Anderson - Town Counsel and EOT (especially Chalita Belfield). Corporate sponsors included Acton Hardware, Advanced Auto Sciences, Bagels Plus, D'Angelo's Restaurants, Donelan's, K-Mart, New England Mountain Biking Association - Phil Keyes, O'Natural's, Subway, Trader Joe's, and most of all, Joyce Reischutz of Pedal Power, who provided employees for planning and setup, outreach, the registration tent, bathroom facilities and the store as a place to come in from the cold.

By popular demand, an Acton Trail Clearing/Clean-Up Day tentatively has been set for March 25, 2006. The date is two weeks before the Annual Town Meeting, a good way to build community support for the vote on the rail trail CPA funding. For further information about the trail in Acton, contact Tom Michelman at: tmichelman@comcast.net.

The Harlem Valley Rail Trail is helping to put Amenia on the map.

Excerpt From The New York Times, October 7, 2005:

"Amenia, a small town (population 4,000) in Dutchess County, New York, is experiencing a revival, due in part to the creation of a rail trail in town. Real estate ads feature the home's proximity to the rail Trail."

Concord Update - Feasibility Study Completed, Trail Cleared from West Concord, Rail Trail Committee Formed, CPA Funding Requested

Concord's Environmental and Engineering Assessment of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail to determine the feasibility of constructing a rail trail on the unused 3.5-mile right of way was completed in August. The consultants, Fay, Spofford, & Thorndike, determined that it was quite feasible to convert the former railroad corridor to a rail trail. "With proper rail trail design sensitive to the project setting and continued public involvement, the rail trail could serve a variety of community functions". A major reason for the project's feasibility is that the state owns the right of way and has been supportive of converting it to a rail trail.

Copies of the 100-page report are available at both town libraries and on the Town's web site: www.concordnet.org.

In mid-September, a collaborative effort between students from Middlesex School and the Friends of BFRT resulted in the clearing of the 1.2 miles of the trail from Concord Park near the MBTA rail station in West Concord to Route 2 near the Acton town line. Over 240 hours of volunteer time were logged on the trail clearing. Thanks to Bob Armstrong and Emily Teller for coordinating the project. This beautiful area is well worth a visit. Don't miss the old prisoners' cemetery between the trail and Route 2 and the open fields near Warner's Pond.



The Board of Selectmen voted in September to form a new Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Advisory Committee. The purpose of the Committee is to advise the Selectmen and Town Manager on matters concerning design, development and maintenance of the rail trail. The Friends submitted a letter to the Selectmen in support of the new committee. Barbara Pike will be the Friends representative on the committee.

The Concord Friends of the BFRT recently submitted a request to the Community Preservation Committee for \$160,000 of CPA funds. These funds would be used to pay for a centerline survey and title search, an in-depth environmental assessment, and preliminary design of the rail trail. When this work is completed, the Town would be eligible to apply for state and federal funds, which are expected to pay for 90% of the design and construction costs. If the Friends' CPA funding request is approved by the Community Preservation Committee and the Selectmen, it will go for a vote at the Annual Town Meeting in April 2006. Stay tuned! For more information call Barbara Pike at 978-369-0437.

Sudbury Update - Huge Show of Support at Sudbury Day, RTCAC Releases Survey Results

Sudbury Town Meeting recently approved \$25,000 in Community Preservation Act funds for an engineering feasibility study of the section of the BFRT in Sudbury that is owned by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation. This section north of Route 20 is part of the BFRT Phase 2.

On a rainy September 17th, the Friends hosted a booth at Sudbury Day, the Town's popular annual festival. A large crowd of attendees poured over BFRT maps, photos, brochures, and a printout of over 100 residential listings in eastern Massachusetts that highlighted homes located alongside or near rail trails. The many realtors exhibiting at Sudbury Day were especially interested to read the positive comments in the listings describing the nearby rail trails. During the day, over 200 residents signed up to support the BFRT in Sudbury. This strong show of support indicates broad interest in the Town in making the rail trail a reality.

Last fall the Sudbury Board of Selectmen formed a Rail Trail Conversion Advisory Committee (RTCAC). Dick Williamson, a member of the Friends, serves as Co-Chair of the RTCAC. The committee's first action resulted in the successful passage of a Town Meeting Article appropriating \$25,000 for an engineering and environmental assessment of the proposed rail trail.

During the summer, the RTCAC sent a questionnaire to all property owners either abutting or living close to the rail right of way. When the responses were tabulated, the top choice among potential uses for the rail bed was a multi-use trail similar to that in Phase 1 of the BFRT. Asphalt was the top choice as a trail surface. However, 29% indicated that they wanted no public access to the rail bed. This indicates angst among some of those living close to the proposed rail trail.

The next step for the RTCAC is to develop a Request for Proposal (RFP) to be sent to potential consultants who would perform the Town's engineering and environmental assessment. If you are interested in helping in Sudbury, contact Dick Williamson at: williamson@LL.mit.edu.

Current Status of Rail Trails

There are now over 13,000 miles of rail trails open in the United States, consisting of about 1,400 trails in over 3,000 communities. The underlying common thread among all projects is that they have become the best-loved and most treasured place in a given community. None of the 1,400 completed rail trails was seen as a mistake by the communities.

Framingham Update – Rails and Ties Removed, Friends Build Support for Rail Trail

The old rail corridor in Framingham has taken on a remarkable transformation. Last winter a contractor hired by CSX Transportation (CSXT) removed the steel rails. Shortly thereafter a man driving a fork lift truck scooped the ties out of the ground and arranged piles of them alongside the right of way. This allowed easy and comfortable access to many walkers and also, with the arrival of snow, quite a few cross country skiers. A newly placed sign at the Belknap Road crossing, which prohibits motorized vehicles and firearms (but not pedestrians), was a reassuring sight to many.

More recently the soft areas of the trail have been filled in with stone ballast to support the weight of the heavy trucks which came and went at odd times during the next several months to remove the wood and steel. These piles were gone by mid-summer leaving a five mile long open pathway from Pleasant Street by the Mass Turnpike bridge north to beyond Friendly's Ice Cream at the corner of Edgell and Rte 20 in Sudbury.

During the summer many people continued to try out the trail path but some have found that the ballast makes walking uncomfortable and bicycling challenging. There also has been occasional use by teenagers riding small but loud motor bikes, a prohibited use and source of irritation to many trail abutters.

Nearly a thousand brochures describing the trail in Framingham have been distributed, and so far the reaction has been overwhelmingly positive. Recent walks along the trail have shown evidence of brush cutting and removal of debris by unknown 'volunteers' in order to keep the path clear.

Negotiations between Sudbury/Framingham and CSXT over the granting of a trail lease or transfer of ownership continue. Framingham Friends are focusing their efforts on building awareness of the trail and identifying and responding to the any concerns that are expressed. Parking, for example, has been mentioned as a concern and at least two potentially new low impact locations have been identified to meet this need.

Thanks Again!

Many thanks to our supporting business partner, Pedal Power Bike and Ski at 176 Great Road in Acton! We encourage you to patronize them and thank Joyce and John for their support of FBFRT. "Friends" may bring this newsletter for a 10% discount on parts and accessories.

Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail
6 Magnolia Drive
Acton MA 01720



Show your support by joining today!

Members will receive newsletters, notices of upcoming trail-related events, and opportunities to actively promote the rail trail through a variety of volunteer activities.



Yes! Sign me up as a supporter of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail and add my name to your mailing list.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$10 | <input type="checkbox"/> Conductor \$100 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family \$25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineer \$250 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor \$50 | <input type="checkbox"/> RR Tycoon \$500+ |

*Conductor and above receive a complimentary BFRT Cap

Name _____

Street _____

City/State/Zip _____

Daytime Phone _____ **Evening Phone** _____

e-mail address _____

Send my newsletter via email (include email address above)

Please enclose a check payable to Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail and mail this form to:

Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail
 118 Border Rd.
 Concord, MA 01742

The Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail is a 501(c)(3) organization—membership fees and donations are tax-deductible as permitted by law.

