

# **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about the Georgetown Recreational Path**

## **History of the Georgetown Recreational Path:**

### **What is the Georgetown Recreational Path?**

It is a four and 1/2 mile corridor of underutilized land which winds through the heart of Georgetown. This parcel of land is officially called an abandoned railroad right of way and was once part of a railroad transportation system. This corridor will provide an improved non-motorized transportation alternative connecting areas of cultural, recreational, commercial and natural significance for residents and tourists of all ages and abilities.

### **When did the idea begin of developing a recreational shared-use path through Georgetown?**

Committees to develop an existing underused and abandoned railroad corridor into a lateral park were formed as early as the 1970's. The idea of a developed shared-use recreational path has been seriously considered for over a decade. The Park and Recreation Commission attempted to secure federal rail-trail funds in the mid-80s but lacked sufficient criteria to be selected. This idea has been part of past and current versions of the Georgetown Master, Recreational and Open Space plans.

### **What is the current land usage of the proposed path?**

It is part of an historic Boston to Maine railroad right-of-way running from Newburyport to Danvers. It was abandoned in 1941. Upon abandonment it was sold to an electric power company and now supports utility poles for power distribution operated by the National Grid Power Company.

### **What is an abandoned RR ROW (right-of-way)?**

It is a corridor which has been a railroad bed whose owner has petitioned the Surface Transportation Board for abandonment. The abandonment applies only to freight rights. This abandonment makes the land eligible for other types of usage, such as the one being proposed.

## **Usage of the Recreational Path:**

### **What uses are proposed for the path?**

Based on a town-wide survey done by the Recreational Path Committee in 2004 the major non-motorized shared usage priorities were walking, cycling, running, dog walking and inline skating.

### **What are the benefits of the path?**

Statistics indicate that suburban dwellers are on average 7 pounds heavier than urbanites. Paving a trail through the heart of Georgetown will encourage greater activity and opportunities to meet and greet neighbors. It will revitalize the existing land corridor that was once the core of social and commercial life in Georgetown. The path will bring renewed usage and activity to the heart of Georgetown.

### **What is the purpose of the proposed path?**

The proposed recreational path will help to preserve the rural character of Georgetown. It will make a healthful recreational option available to all residents and visitors. The proposed corridor will link all Georgetown neighborhoods and adjacent towns, such as Boxford and Newbury, with Georgetown's commercial areas. Within Georgetown it will serve as a non-motorized shared-use path that will link the schools, the Peabody Library, Camp Denison, American Legion Park, the Crane Pond Wildlife Management Reservation and the Parker River.

### **Does the path extend to other towns?**

The survey done in 2004 showed overwhelming support for extending the trail to other towns and the chances of receiving federal funding are enhanced with a regional trail. Georgetown is a member of the Boston to Border (B2B) Coalition whose objective is a 28 mile long trail including the towns of Salisbury, Newburyport, Newbury, Georgetown, Boxford, Topsfield, Wenham and Danvers.

### **What rules will govern usage?**

The Recreational Path Committee will create a bylaw which will require **town meeting approval**. Suggestions and ideas are welcome. Once the bylaw is in place, it will be enforceable by the Georgetown Police Department.

### **What will be the hours of operation?**

Current path usage is planned to be from **dawn to dusk**. As all particulars governing usage of the path this will be determined by a Georgetown Recreational Path Bylaw.

**Will lighting be installed along the path?**

No. Path usage is currently planned to be from dawn to dusk and will be included in the Bylaw which will be created and presented to the town for approval.

**Will the path be handicap accessible?**

Yes, it will meet Americans with Disabilities Act standards.

**Will the path be used year round?** Yes. Current planning does not call for snow removal during the winter months. During winter months: cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, bird watching and trekking are encouraged as wintertime non-motorized uses.

**Are dogs allowed on the path?** Yes, but under the control of the owner and in compliance with the town bylaws governing path usage and current leash laws.

**Planning done by the Georgetown Recreational Path Committee:**

**Has the town been surveyed relative to the proposed recreational path?**

Yes, two thousand survey letters were sent out through the Georgetown light department billing distribution system in 2004. 500 responses were received. 90% were in favor of a shared-use pathway. 85% were in favor of connections to other towns. A usage survey was a component of the study. Results can be viewed at [http://www.georgetownma.gov/Public\\_Documents/GeorgetownMA\\_BComm/rec\\_path](http://www.georgetownma.gov/Public_Documents/GeorgetownMA_BComm/rec_path)

**Has title research been done on the ROW?**

Yes, a Salem law firm has determined that the National Grid owns 2/3 of the ROW in fee and has easements on the remaining 1/3. There is some private ownership between Andover St. and West Main St. The Recreational Path Committee is in the process of conducting a more definitive title and ROW research.

**Does the planning process involve other towns along the ROW corridor?**

Yes, in 2006 the selectmen signed a resolution for Georgetown to be a member of the Boston to Border (B2B) Coalition. It includes the towns of Salisbury, Newburyport, Newbury, Georgetown, Boxford, Topsfield, Wenham, and Danvers. The Coalition meets several times per year and has created a Regional Trail Implementation Plan. The Plan was presented to Mass Highway and Mass Highway created a B2B task force resulting in the release of Federal and State funds of \$1.2 million dollars to contract a preliminary design of the entire 28 Mile B2B proposed route. The contract is out for bid and the award is planned for the end of June, 2008.

**Has a feasibility study been performed on this project?**

Yes, the engineering company of Fay, Spofford and Thorndike did a Feasibility and Conceptual Design Study for the Georgetown segment that was completed in July, 2007. The report validated the feasibility of the project. The report can be downloaded from the following link: [http://www.georgetownma.gov/Public documents/georgetownma\\_webdocs/Feasibility%20&%20Conceptual%20Design %20Study.pdf](http://www.georgetownma.gov/Public%20documents/georgetownma_webdocs/Feasibility%20&%20Conceptual%20Design%20Study.pdf)

**Environmental Considerations of the Recreational Path:**

**What are the significant environmental considerations along the recreational path?**

The feasibility study included a preliminary screening conducted to identify critical areas where impact avoidance/minimization and mitigation measures may need to be incorporated into the project design. The screening was based on information obtained from state agencies and available MassGIS data.

The following areas were addressed:

Wetland and water resources

Endangered species

Cultural and Historic Resources

Hazardous materials

They can be found in section three of the feasibility study.

**Reducing, Reusing and Recycling are the new “gold standards” of environmental protection. How will the recreational path meet these goals?**

**Reduce:** The path will be a corridor for only non-motorized means of transportation therefore reducing dependence on fossil fuels.

Highways and cars have led to isolation whereas the trail will lead to active healthful lifestyles and increased community interaction.

**Reuse:** The transformation of a once vital transportation corridor into another means for travel is the ultimate in recycling. The development of the path as a lateral park will once again revitalize an historic icon now left idle.

**Recycle:** The Recreational Path Committee will investigate the possibilities of using recycled and sustainable materials in the construction and maintenance of the path. Examples of possible green construction materials include recycled pavement and certified sustainable wood.

### **What material will be used for the recreational path surface?**

The current planning specifies an asphalt pavement. The committee is open to alternative hard surfaces that may have less environmental impact.

## **Economic and Security Considerations of the Recreational Path:**

### **How will the path affect property values of abutters?**

Towns which have similar paths report an increase in property values along and near to the trail. Real Estate agents report that many homeowners are desirous of proximity to recreational paths because of increased convenience for transportation and accessibility to safe family recreation.

### **Will the path affect general property values within the town of Georgetown?**

The path will be a definite asset to the town that will increase the quality of life. It is expected that the path will have an overall positive impact on property values.

### **Does the path increase security risks?**

It has been found that shared use paths can improve security to an area because they bring a community presence and vigilance to an otherwise vacant area. Georgetown's current Police Chief has experience monitoring a large urban rail trail and is committed to assessing security needs as the project progresses. For further information please refer to the Police Chief link at the top of the Recreational Path Committee page on the Town of Georgetown website.

### **How will the path address safety concerns?**

**The intended surface of paved asphalt will be a safe surface and will minimize the likelihood of injury for all wheeled vehicles and foot traffic. Proper fencing to protect sensitive areas from path users and protect users from sensitive or dangerous areas will be erected. In addition, the Georgetown Police Department will make regular and random patrols of the path.**

**What will be done to protect abutters against litter?**

The litter policy will be “carry in and carry out” along the trail. Users will be expected to leave no trace.

**How will abutter privacy be impacted?**

If warranted, abutters in close proximity to the path may seek privacy mitigation through screening, fencing and plantings.

**How much will this cost?** The estimates for design and construction provided by Fay, Spofford, and Thorndike as part of the Feasibility and Conceptual Design Study of July, 2007 are \$4400K for construction and \$550K for design. These figures include 3% inflation for five years and also a 15% contingency.

**How will the path be funded?**

Initial expenses are funded by Community Preservation Grants. Design and Construction will be funded by the following possibilities: Federal Earmarks, Federal Transportation Enhancement Funds, Congestion Mitigation Funds, and the State match for these programs. The town needs to acquire the rights to the ROW and successfully complete the 25% design in order to qualify for final design and construction through these funding avenues.

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