

*Town of Swampscott
Recreational Trail Study Committee
March 5, 2003*

Swampscott's Recreational Trail Study Committee, formed to assess the feasibility of developing a Town-sanctioned trail along the abandoned railroad right-of-way currently owned by National Grid, has completed its review. It is the opinion of the Committee that, while significant challenges which we have attempted to identify in this report will accompany the project, the creation of such a trail is feasible.

The Committee has arrived at this determination after considering the testimony and presentations of subject matter experts and trail opponents and proponents. We have also reviewed considerable documentation submitted by parties on both sides of the issue. These support materials have been placed on file with the Town Clerk and at the Public Library and are currently available for public review.

While the Committee has considered the arguments of trail opponents, the negative impacts that they predict are speculative. The experience of communities that currently host trails similar to the proposed Swampscott Trail simply does not support the conclusion that public safety, personal privacy or individual property rights will be unacceptably compromised by this initiative.

The assessment reached by the Committee has been made using certain underlying assumptions. This report will identify those assumptions as well as the project elements the Committee feels must be addressed in order to have a viable trail project. The report is organized into three parts:

- Basic assumptions - In order to consider feasibility, the committee assumed the trail would have a defined scale and character and would be designed and constructed in accordance with accepted professional standards. Any

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proposal made to Town Meeting that does not include these basic assumptions is not subject to the Committee's feasibility determination.

- Critical Issues - During the weeks of public testimony and presentations, several issues were repeatedly identified as being of great concern. In the opinion of the Committee, it is essential that these issues be addressed before construction of a recreational trail goes forward. Although selecting specific solutions for many of these project issues is not within the scope or authority of this Committee, where appropriate we have proposed project conditions and acknowledged useful suggestions and recommendations that have arisen during the study.
- Finally, the Committee will offer some suggestions of its own. Our experience over the last six months has allowed us to gain insight into the problems and potential a recreational trail would create. We believe this insight to be objective and that it will prove useful to those seeking to pursue the trail issue further.

Basic Assumptions:

- The principle proponent of a recreational trail has been the Swampscott Partnership Initiative, Rails-into-Trails (SPIRIT). Any proposal made to Town Meeting will probably be done under their sponsorship and, in all likelihood, they would be directly involved in design and construction activities if a trail proposal is supported by the Town. In July 2002, the group prepared a document that outlined their vision for a Swampscott Recreational Trail, *The Plan for the Swampscott Rail Trail*. While the Committee does not endorse the SPIRIT plan, we have found that the plan offers a conceptual framework upon which to build. The scope, character and private funding of the project as proposed by SPIRIT are practical and appropriate for a Swampscott initiative. Prominent elements of the SPIRIT plan included:

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- A trail route that would begin on Seaview Avenue on the Marblehead/Swampscott line and would continue for 1.1 miles terminating at Walker Road.
- A trail that would be unpaved. Like the existing Marblehead trail, the surface would be hard packed earth, possibly including the use of an aggregate material such as stone dust or lin-pack.
- A trail project where construction and maintenance costs would not be borne by the Town. Plans are to finance the project through an assortment of funding sources including private donations and federal and state grants. Plans also include participation of volunteers.

Critical Issues:

- Legal issues associated with property boundaries, public use and access to the right-of-way including the securing of easements and/or execution of any eminent domain actions, must be resolved to the satisfaction of Town Counsel/Board of Selectmen before any construction activity begins.
- All activities associated with the construction and operation of the trail project must be conducted in full compliance of all applicable statutes and regulations, including:
 - The Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act
 - Americans with Disabilities Act
 - Local building codes, and
 - Public safety requirements
- Public access to the trail will be restricted to non-motorized vehicles and limited to daylight (dawn to dusk) hours.
- All trail designs must:

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- Address the seasonal flooding conditions in the Nason Road area and other locations along the trail route.
- Be "full-build" proposals. Designs with segmented trail development will not be considered.
- Funding:
 - No municipal funding will be sought for any aspect of engineering, planning, design or construction of a trail.
 - Funding sufficient to complete a substantial portion of the trail must be secured prior to construction.
- Public Safety - If, at any time, police or fire officials determine the establishment or operation of a recreational trail will create an unacceptable public safety risk to residents of Swampscott or their property, the trail initiative ceases to be feasible.
 - Fire - Local residents have raised concern that fire fighting equipment can not now access the area in back of Nason Road and that in the event a trail is established, the increased threat of unauthorized camp and brush fires will create an unacceptable public safety risk.

The Committee has agreed to circulate this report to the Swampscott Fire Department for comments and recommendations. Public safety risks identified by the Department should be fully addressed in design and construction phase of the project.

- Police - The Swampscott Police Department has been actively engaged in the Trail Study process throughout the Committee's deliberations. Police officials indicate they would be able to provide adequate public safety to protect the community in the event a trail is established.

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- Mitigation efforts (i.e. the lessening of perceived adverse impacts) -
Wherever possible, design of the trail should include mitigation to lessen trail impacts on abutters. Mitigation measures may include the use of vegetative screens to provide increased privacy for abutters and increasing the buffer zone between property lines and the actual hard packed trail. It is also recommended that when town boards must approve activities that may lessen perceived impacts of a trail, those bodies consider such requests favorably.
- Road Crossings - Although the proposed trail route crosses many Swampscott streets, significant concern has been raised over three street crossings:
 - Bradlee Avenue - A steep incline exists from the existing right-of-way embankment to the street and there is general agreement that anyone coming off the incline, particularly children on bicycles, would be in substantial danger from vehicular traffic on Bradlee Ave. Suggested methods of addressing the problem include:
 - "Dead ending" Bradlee Avenue at the trail crossing.
 - Building "switchbacks" that would provide an engineered slow exit off the embankment.
 - Increasing the length of the incline and reducing the grade of the slope
 - Adding Stop signs and/or speed bumps
 - Construction of a pedestrian bridge.
 - Humphrey Street - Crossing of a main roadway with heavy traffic. Suggested methods of addressing the problem include:
 - Establishing a crosswalk at the trail crossing
 - Establish a traffic signal at the crossing
 - Increased traffic enforcement

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- Walker Road - The proposed terminus of the trail, a steep incline exists from the existing right-of-way to the street. As with the Bradlee crossing the danger to children on bicycles is particularly significant. Suggested methods of addressing the problem include:
 - Erecting a fence to dead end the trail.
 - Building "switchbacks" that would provide an engineered slow exit off the embankment.
 - Increasing the length of the incline and reducing the grade of the slope
 - Adding Stop signs and/or speed bumps

Committee Recommendations:

- The role of this Committee was to determine whether a recreational trail was feasible. Responsibility for subsequent steps in the trail development process, including development of design and construction plans should be undertaken by a body or bodies appointed by the Board of Selectmen. This body should include representatives from:
 - A Neighborhood/Abutters Group
 - A Trail Proponent group
 - The Swampscott Recreation Committee
 - The Swampscott Conservation Commission
 - The Swampscott Department of Public Works
 - The Swampscott Police Department
 - The Swampscott Fire Department

Final authorization of the project may be subject to the approval of the Town Meeting.

- The Committee recommends that, if a trail is constructed, an oversight body be appointed to coordinate maintenance activities and establish rules for trail use and operation. Unlike the body appointed for oversight of design

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and construction, this board should be a long-term or continuing appointment. It too should be representative of trail stakeholders

- Trail Maintenance - Trail design should avoid elements that may eventually increase costs to trail maintenance; e.g. no parking lots, minimum use of trash receptacles, minimum use of materials that require maintenance or pruning.
- Trail design need not be held to an established "bike path standard." In areas where a more modest trail design is appropriate and desirable, the less intrusive design should be selected.
- While the Committee believes that the Town should not assume responsibility for maintaining the trail, it is the Committee's opinion that Town resources can and should be allowed to assist in these efforts when the resources are otherwise available and use of the resource is appropriate and practical.
- Finally, the Committee wishes to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of trail opponents, the Swampscott Taxpayers Assessing the Rail Trail (START) and trail proponents, the Swampscott Partnership Initiative, Rails-into-Trails (SPIRIT). The Committee strongly recommends that if development of a recreational trail proposal moves forward, representatives of these organizations establish a formalized process of communication/arbitration.

Submitted by the Committee March 5, 2003.

William R DiMento, Committee Chairman

Margaret G. Barmack, Resident

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Myles E. Brown, Resident

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