

Riverside Trails Update

By Ted Chapman

The study of the Two Bridges Riverside Trail funded by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation - Recreational Trails Program (DCR-RTP) is underway. The grant is being administered by a coalition of the Riverside Greenway Working Group, composed of Bike Newton, the Newton Conservators, Herb Nolan from the Solomon Foundation of Wellesley, Tod Cochran of Auburndale and myself as project manager. We have hired the BCS Group to undertake the survey and 25% design of this trail and bridges. BSC was chosen from three responses to our request for proposal.

The coalition held a meeting of an advisory group on Jan 6th, 2018 inviting city officials from Newton, Wellesley and Weston, representatives from the Mass DCR, Mass DOT, regional bike-pedestrian advocates and residents of Lower Falls, who have been vocal on trails-related issues. The team heard and will address concerns about the effects of the trail on issues like parking on neighborhood streets. A significant outcome of this meeting was a decision to follow the example of Wellesley and Weston and request the City to consider establishing a city wide trails committee.

The Working Group has expanded its vision beyond the Two Bridges Trail to the creation of a Greenway connecting Wellesley Hills and Lyon's Park in Auburndale. This Greenway would consist of an accessible multiuse trail, primarily using existing roads and specifically excluding the rail line behind Clearwater and St. Mary's Streets in Lower Falls. The Greenway will also include a series of footpaths designed to create hiking access to paths close to the shores of the Charles Rivers.

This Greenway vision was presented on February 1st at a meeting at the State House hosted by Representative Kay Khan with representatives' from the Governor's office, Mass DCR, Mass DOT, and the MBTA to explore the significant obstacles confronting this vision. These include the closure of the Recreation Road Bridge and historic Riverside Depot Tunnel. Recent progress on trails mentioned in Governor Baker's speeches at Mayor Fuller's inauguration and his State of the State, is due to the coordinating function played by Joel Barrera, Deputy Chief of Staff for Cabinet Affairs and Strategic Innovation. Joel has brought various state agencies involved with trails together monthly to manage the significant increase in funding for trails throughout the state, including the Riverside area. At this meeting commitments were made to fast-track solutions to the obstacles discussed. Rep. Khan arranged funding for the bridge to be included in a recent infrastructure bill.

To maintain momentum towards this Greenway vision, the Working Group has applied for another grant from the 2018 DCR-RTP grant program. This grant will fund renovation of the Pony Truss Trail that runs from the termination of the Two Bridges Trail at Riverside along the south bank of the Charles to the Riverside Depot

Tunnel. The grant includes two other components — the survey and 25% design of the Pigeon Hill Trail, between the LaSalle boathouse and Oakland Ave., and the reconfiguration of the entrance to the Riverside Depot Tunnel at the termination of the Pony Truss Trail.

A significant component of the funding for the Pony Truss Trail will be the involvement of community volunteers who will learn the skills needed to construct and maintain this and other footpaths along the bank of the Charles in Newton Lower Falls, Wellesley and Weston. We have opened a dialogue with the Leo J. Martin Golf Course, the DCR and the Weston and Newton Conservation Commissions to design year-round walking trails that can safely coexist with existing recreational uses, golf and skiing, on the open space along this 3-miles of riverfront. These trails were envisioned in the LFIA Alternatives Trails Study group in 2009.

To provide the higher level planning not eligible for funding through the DCR-RTP, the Working Group's major partner, the Lawrence and Lillian Solomon Foundation, is funding a feasibility/10% design study. The study includes accessible components of this Greenway from Riverside, along the Connector Road to Riverside Park, under Recreation Rd through the MWRA site, across the Recreation Rd. Bridge at the LaSalle boathouse, and on the street grid to access the Historic Riverside Boathouse canoe and kayak rental, Norumbega Park and along Commonwealth Ave. to Lyon's Park. There the Greenway will connect to the current termination of the Charles River/Blue Heron Trail with access to Waltham, Watertown, and downtown Boston and soon to be opened trails to Cambridge and Alewife.

The design work will provide the city of Newton, state agencies and private interests with the information they need to help connect the dots. We are meeting with various Newton City departments, the MBTA Commuter Rail Division and the Mayor's Office, city councilors, the Newton Conservation Commission, the Newton Conservators, the Bike Pedestrian Task Force and Bike Newton's Safer Routes to School Program to coordinate trail activity in Newton. The team will also advocate with evolving plans for the Riverside MBTA site development to be sure they include accommodations for bike and pedestrian use.

Closer to home the LFIA Beautification Committee is encouraging further clean up and additional landscaping of the trail segment between Concord Ave and the Stinger Bridge to Wellesley Hills. We are negotiating with the DCR and Leo J Martin Golf Course management to design and construct a foot path in the woods (not using the rail corridor) between Clearwater Road and the fairway in the golf course from Pine Grove to the Two Bridges Trail.