

WARE RIVER VALLEY GREENWAY TRAIL EXTENSION



A SITE ASSESSMENT REPORT PREPARED FOR:

TOWN OF WARE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICE
PAUL E. HILLS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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Table of contents

Acknowledgements.....	v
Executive Summary	vi
Index of Maps and Images	vii
Chapter 1 THE WARE RIVER VALLEY GREENWAY TRAIL	
The Vision	1
Planning Process and Public Participation	2
Chapter 2 ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT	
History	4
Present General Condition	4
Conditions	6
Conclusion	13
Chapter 3 RIVER AND OPEN SPACE ACCESS	
The Ware River	18
The Banas Farm	18
15.8 Acre Open Space Parcel	19

Chapter 4 **PLANNING AND DESIGN**

Trail Design Standards	20
Slope Stabilization	23
Wetlands/Drainage	23
Road Crossings	24
Water Crossings	24
Abutters	27
ATV Trail Crossings	27
Parking	29
Viewsheds	29
Trail Connector Routes	29
Dumping and Debris	30
Environmental Impact Report	32

Chapter 5 **ECONOMIC ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT**

Railway Corridor Trail	34
Bridges	35
Connector Routes	35
Trail Maintenance	36

Appendix A **TRAIL ABUTTERS**

Appendix B **TITLE SEARCH**

REFERENCES

Acknowledgments

The plan for converting the abandoned Boston and Maine rail corridor into a recreational trail has evolved over time with the commitment and support of many people. As early as 1987 the idea was recorded in the Town of Ware's Open Space Plan. In 1997, the initial feasibility study by J. Geo Pensoneault was completed representing substantial progress toward the realization of the proposed trail. Presently the town of Ware is considering several Engineering and Design Proposals for that portion of the Ware River Valley Greenway Trail. Funding has been granted for this phase of the project assuring its completion. Clearly the plan is well underway.

This feasibility study on the extension to the initial greenway trail owes much to the efforts of those who worked on the first study and who followed up on the implementation process. The continuation of those efforts has been made easier by all the work that has gone into the project to date. Paul Hills, Executive Director of Ware Community Development Department has been instrumental in all phases of the project from inception. His continued guidance and support is appreciated. Jeff McCollough, Transportation Planner with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission has provided expertise in the area of economic analysis and has given insight in the successful implementation of multi-use trails.

This report was completed as a graduate summer internship arranged through the Ware Community Development Office and the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Thanks to John Mullin and Sheila Koczur at the University for their assistance. Thanks also goes to the Massachusetts executive Office of Environmental Affairs Department of Environmental Management for providing funding through the Greenways and Trails Demonstration Grants Program. This program has provided seed funding for a number of community supported greenway projects throughout Massachusetts.

Executive Summary

Greenways serve multiple purposes in cities and rural areas throughout the world. They have the capacity to improve water quality, protect or increase the diversity of animal and plant species, connect cultural resources, contribute to educational and social agendas, enhance economic development and improve the quality of life for those living in the communities they serve. The establishment of greenways is an issue of national importance as can be learned from the President's Commission on American Outdoors (1987). The Commission stated its vision for the future. A living network of greenways...to provide people with access to open spaces close to where they live, and to link together the rural and urban spaces in the American landscape...threading through cities and countrysides like a giant circulation system. The Ware River Valley Greenway Trails Project is a part of this vision. It is an integral part for the people of the Ware River Valley Region of Massachusetts.

This Ware River Valley Greenway Trails Project is a continuation of the 1997 Project of the same name that served as a first step toward implementation of a multi use recreational greenway corridor along the west bank of the Ware River. This project explores the feasibility of continuing that trail as well as increasing access to and utilizing additional open space along the Ware River. It investigates planning and design options and offers ideas for expanding the vision for the Ware River Valley Greenway.

Goals of the Ware River Valley Greenway Trails Project

1. Convert previous Boston and Maine railroad corridors to a paved, multi use recreational trail.
2. Interconnect public open spaces on the Ware River that are currently owned by the town of Ware.
3. Link the southern extension of the trail to the northern section of the Ware River Valley Greenway Trail.
4. Achieve access to the Ware River for recreational purposes.
5. Advance the creation of a statewide greenway trail network through linkage to the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail to the north and east and the Norwottuck Trail to the west.
6. Improve the understanding, appreciation and preservation of the natural resources that occur within the Ware River Valley.

Index of Maps and Images

Maps

#	Description	Page
Map 1-1	Context Map	3
Map 1-2	Project Locator Map	3
Map 2-1	Northern Trail Section	5
Map 2-2	Road Crossings	8
Map 3-1	Water Crossings	10
Map 4-1	Connector Routes	31

Images

Fig. 2-1	Photographic Inventory (images a-i)	15 - 17
Fig. 4-1	Cross Section of Greenway Trail	21
Fig. 4-2	Fences as Buffers	22
Fig. 4-3	Plan View of Road Crossing	25
Fig. 4-4	Railroad Abutment as Promontory	26
Fig. 4-5	Conceptual Design for Water Crossing	26
Fig. 4-6	Vegetative Buffer Zone	28
Fig. 4-7	Fence as Buffer Zone	28
Fig. 4-8	Hedgerow as Buffer Zone	28

Chapter 1

The Vision

A multi use trail and protected greenway system along the Ware River is a local initiative that is an integral part of a nationwide vision. That vision as stated in the 1987 President's Commission on the American Outdoors recommended the establishment of a living network of greenways...to provide people with access to open spaces close to where they live, and to link together the rural and urban spaces in the American landscape. Julius Fabos, coeditor of a recent book on Greenways, envisions that when the future greenway systems are mapped for the United States, Canada, or any other country, they will be as evident on national, state, regional and local maps as our highway or railway networks are today.

Why is it that Greenways are so vital to a community that a worldwide movement to implement them has developed? Greenways efficiently provide numerous benefits that enhance the quality of life through the use of land for multiple purposes. Environmental, recreational, educational, cultural, social, and economic benefits evolve from the development of greenways. Greenways can help preserve or improve water quality, and mitigate the effects of environmental pollution and degradation. They can provide wildlife habitat and promote and protect native plant communities. Greenways can offer recreational opportunities for walking, hiking, jogging, biking, riding, boating, fishing, swimming and picnicking to name just a few. They can provide alternate transportation routes reducing traffic and its attendant pollution. Educational and social benefits can be derived from greenways by providing spaces for outdoor classrooms and study areas, or community gardens and by linking natural, cultural and historic sites. Greenways support a stronger sense of community by improving aesthetics and becoming a shared project and resource. Economic benefits in the form of increased property values, tourism development and commercial opportunities are an additional effect of Greenways. (Bueno et al, 1995 - Greenways) The Ware River Valley Greenway and Trail has the capability of realizing all of these effects.

The Ware River Valley Greenway and Trail Southern Extension will create a 1.6 mile paved multi-use recreational trail that will be a southward extension of the northern section that is currently under design. This trail will lead to the Palmer town line where it is expected to link to that town's trail system in the future thereby becoming part of a regional recreation web. It also advances the creation and implementation of a statewide greenway and trail network through potential for future linkage to the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail to the north and east and the Norwottuck Trail to the west. The greenway system will also provide public access to the Ware River through two publicly owned properties, which anchor each end of this section of the trail.

In addition this project will support the goals of the Ware River Valley Recreational Access and Habitat Protection Proposal, which calls for the development of a Canoe Trail in neighboring Hardwick. By creating additional access to the Ware River, continuation of the canoe trail through the navigable waters of Ware could result. By developing regional links such as this, the town of Ware, as well as her neighbors, will continue to advance their goals for economic and community development.

The proposed route for the Ware River Valley Greenway and Trails follows the right-of-way of the former Massachusetts central route of the Boston and Maine Railroad. Now owned by the town, this section of the railbed is well suited for trail development. It extends roughly two miles south from the former river crossing at Robbins Road to Gibb's Crossing. Town owned land at each end of the railbed (the 61-acre Banas farm and a 15.8-acre parcel at Gibb's Crossing) will provide parking and access points for the trail as well as potential recreation development sites.

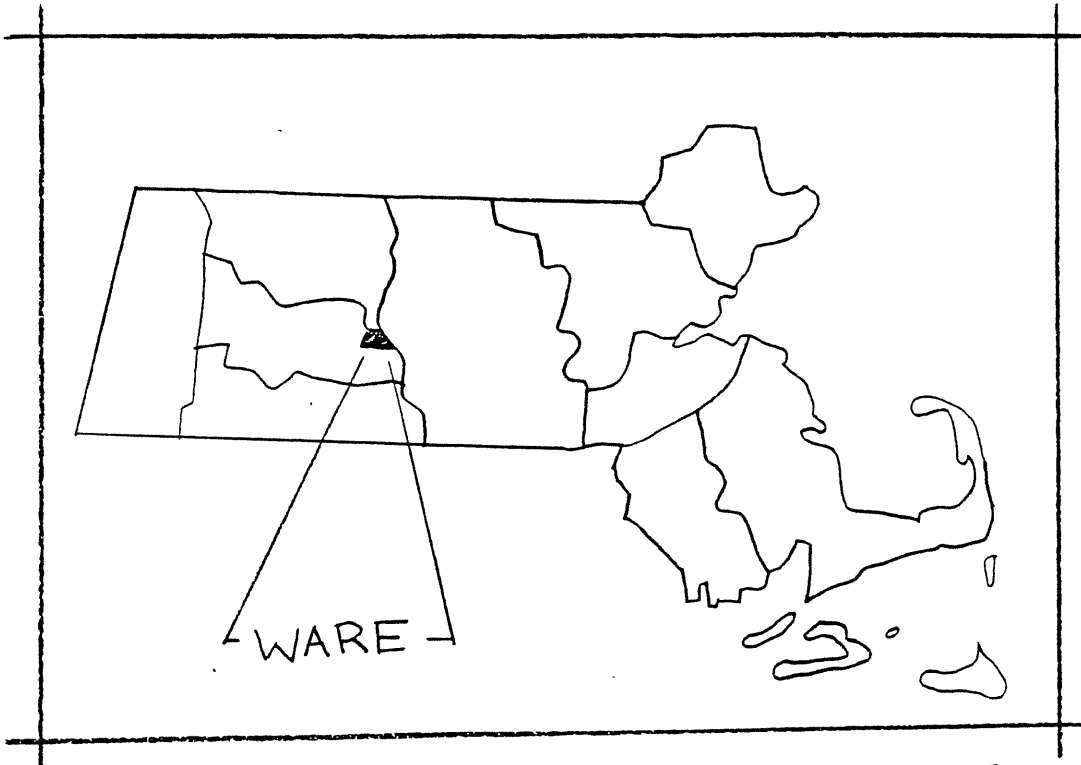
Planning Process and Public Participation

The development of a greenway corridor and paved trail system along the Ware River is being guided at the community level through the Ware Community Development Office. In January of 1998 Community Development Director, Paul Hills, submitted an application to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management's 1998 Greenways and Trails Demonstration Grants Program. This application sought funding for a planning and research project that would lead to the southward extension of the Ware River Valley Greenway and Trail.

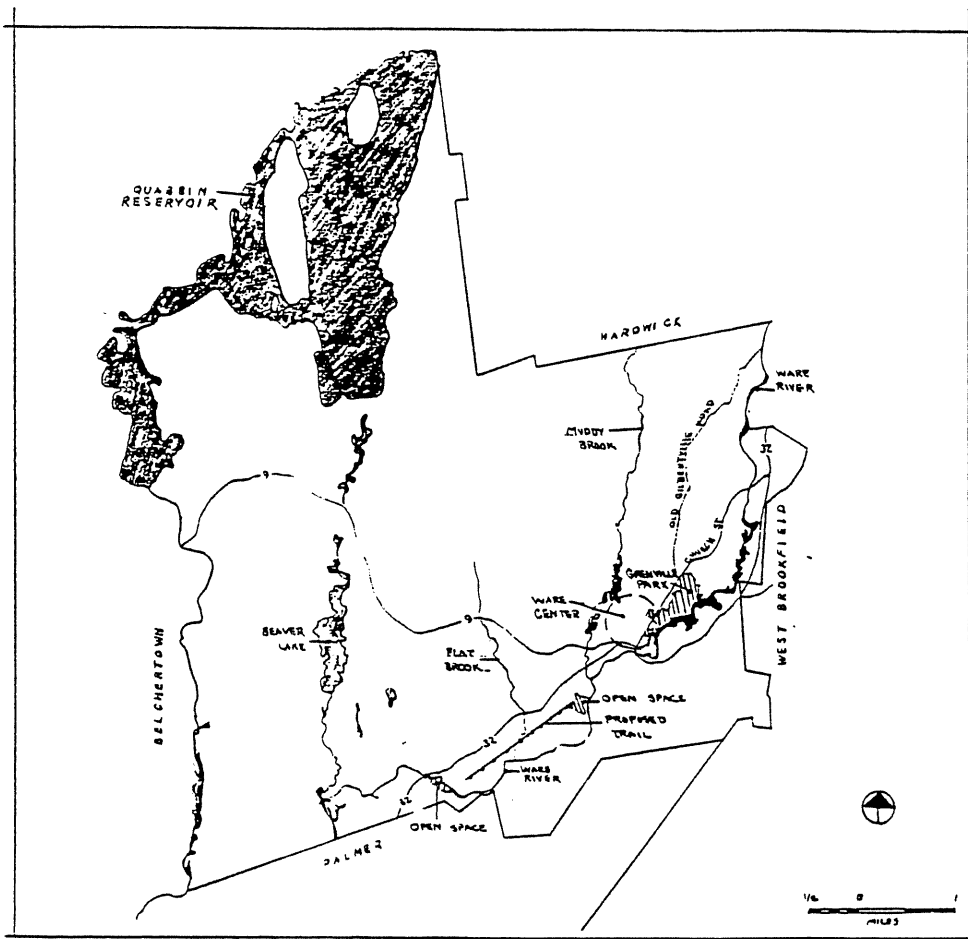
The project has the unified endorsement of Ware's Conservation Commission, Parks Commission and Recreation Commission. The support of Ware's residents is evidenced by their enthusiastic participation in community meetings where they set the goals and objectives and enlarged the vision of the Ware River Valley Greenway and Trail.

The Ware Community Development Department at their June 1998 meeting, voted to retain the services of Susan L. Brown to complete a feasibility study for the Ware River Valley Greenway and Trail extension. Work on the project began immediately with a literature review of the 1997 Ware River Valley Greenway Trails Project by J. Gieo Pensoneault, the 1997 Open Space and Recreation Plan for the town of Ware by Justin M. Berthiaume and Vera Koliass, and other current greenway literature. Ms Brown used a number of town reports, plans and statements as well as resident input to complete the plan. Throughout the research and writing process Ms Brown's progress was guided and monitored by Mr. Hills.

This feasibility study was completed on September 3, 1998.



Map 1-1 Context Map



Map 1-2
Project Locator Map