

Go West, Young Rider Mass Central Rail Trail's Westward Progress

by John Dieckmann

When completed, the Mass Central Rail Trail (MCRT) will stretch 104 miles, from North Point Park (opposite the Museum of Science at the Boston-Cambridge line), all the way to Northampton. The Belmont Community Path would eventually be a segment of the MCRT. As the community path feasibility study moves forward here in Belmont, several towns to our immediate west are making ongoing progress developing segments of the trail.

The epicenter of trail progress today is Wayland, which is likely to be first to complete the projects listed below. We'll describe the plans town-by-town in order heading westward, in Waltham, Weston, Wayland, and Sudbury.

WALTHAM. As the Belmont Citizens Forum reported in its November-December 2016 *Newsletter*, an RFP for the detailed design of the Waltham section was released in October, though it was soon rescinded in order to add more detail. Currently Waltham is redrafting the RFP to include information about a critical gap in the Waltham portion of about 3,800 feet, from Waverley Square to Beaver Street.

The town intends to pay for the detailed design using Waltham Community Preservation funds, then pay for construction with state and federal highway funds via the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization, whose Transportation Improvement Plan allocates capital funding over a five-year period. In preparation, local residents have cleared the Waltham right-of-way during several volunteer days over the past two years. It has since been kept up almost single-handedly by Laurel Carpenter, a Lexington resident and leader of the Waltham Land Trust volunteer trail stewards. The Waltham right-of-way now is easily passable on foot or on mountain bike.



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The ceremonial groundbreaking in Wayland. Manning the shovels, from left to right, are Cherry Carlson, chairwoman of the Wayland board of selectmen; Dan Hill, Wayland planning board member; and Larry Kiernan, leader of the Wayland Friends of the MCRT. Both Carlson and Hill have been longtime local supporters of the MCRT.

WESTON. Planning and design is underway to continue the trail from the Waltham western border for three miles in Weston. An Eversource transmission line shares the Weston right-of-way; the company will build an access and maintenance road that it will share with the MCRT. (Eversource, formerly Northeast Utilities, merged with Boston-based NStar, and is New England's largest energy provider.)

WAYLAND. The access road from Weston will continue for about two miles into Wayland until it reaches the Wayland Depot. The project was presented to the Wayland Conservation Commission on October 20. The plan is for construction to get underway in spring of 2017.

From the Wayland depot, the MCRT crosses Routes 27 and 126 just north of Route 20 (Boston Post Road). A short segment (0.3 miles) runs westward until it crosses Route 20 near Russell's Garden Center. A crowd of about 50 public officials and grassroots advocates was on hand for this segment's groundbreaking November 15.

This work has been combined with a flood control project and will improve parking at the depot as well. The cost of the project is being covered by a combination of developer funding and Wayland Community Preservation funds.



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The MCRT right of way, looking eastward from the Wayland Depot Area.

SUDBURY. Going west from the Wayland project, again the right-of-way is shared with Eversource, which will build another access road, again doubling as the community path for the MCRT. That segment will include the rest of Wayland (another mile) and all of Sudbury (five-and-a-half miles), joining with the north-south Bruce Freeman Rail Trail, which continues through Framingham, Sudbury, Concord, Acton, Westford, Carlisle, and Chelmsford. This segment is advancing steadily, and will be the subject of an update in a future newsletter.

Conclusion

Within a relatively few years, these segments of the MCRT could be complete, including the Belmont section. Belmont residents can look forward to travelling unimpeded from Somerville all the way to the Sudbury-Hudson town line, a distance of about 20 miles.

John Dieckmann is vice president of Belmont Citizens Forum and an avid cyclist.

Environmental Events

Friends of Fresh Pond Reservation Annual Meeting and Potluck Supper **Sunday, January 22, 5-7 PM**

Help us celebrate over 15 years of educational programs and stewardship. Enjoy good food and learn about the activities of the Friends group. Following supper, we will briefly review the past year, then share ideas for future programs and projects at Fresh Pond in a relaxed roundtable discussion. Guests and newcomers welcome. RSVP to Catherine Pedemonti at friendsoffreshpond@yahoo.com. *Basement of Neville Place, 650 Concord Avenue, Cambridge*

Winter Nature Storytime at Fresh Pond **Friday, January 27, 10-11 AM**

Friends of Fresh Pond host children and their caretakers for some arts and crafts, followed by nature story time. We will read about what humans and wildlife do during the winter. Bring warm clothes for a winter walk. Enter the back of the building and turn left. *Art Room at Neville Place, 650 Concord Avenue, Cambridge*

Mass Audubon's Superbowl of Birding 2017 **Saturday, January 28, 5 AM-5 PM**

How many species can you spot? The challenge is renewed this year, with prizes awarded in 10 categories. Rules and entry fees at bit.ly/Zilz5ro *Joppa Flats Education Center, 1 Plum Island Turnpike, Newburyport*

"More than Honey" Documentary Screening **Monday, January 30, 6-7:30 PM**

Friends of Fresh Pond host a film journey through the honeybee colonies in California, Switzerland, China, and Australia. This 2012 documentary explores the phenomenon known as colony collapse disorder and how it will impact humanity. *First floor of Neville Place, 650 Concord Avenue, Cambridge*

Sustainable Belmont Meetings **Wednesday, February 1 & March 1, 7-8:30 PM**

Sustainable Belmont's regular monthly meeting. *Assembly Room, Belmont Public Library, Concord Avenue, Belmont*

MA Water Resources Commission **Thursday, February 9, 1-4 PM**

Discussions of conditions, regulations, hydrologic monitoring, and more. *Conference Room 2B, 100 Cambridge Street, Boston*