

The Boxford Recreational Path Sub-Committee

The Boxford Recreational Path Sub-Committee is proposing creation of an eight+/- foot wide 2.25+/- mile long, multi-use, non vehicular recreational trail along the existing electrical utility and former railroad right-of-way located in East Boxford. The trail would commence at the Georgetown/Boxford town line near Camp Denison, run along the right-of-way to Depot Road, continue to Bare Hill Road, go over the Bare Hill Road/ Route 95 bridge, continue to Old Bare Hill Road, Pye Brook Road to the railroad right-of-way, running along the right-of-way, and terminate at the Boxford/Topsfield town line in the Topsfield Pye Brook Recreation Area. Surrounding towns are simultaneously working on the creation and planning of similar pathways that would link with Boxford's pathway to form a contiguous 30+/- mile recreational trail from Salisbury to Danvers along the former Newburyport Branch right-of-way known as Borders to Boston..

The current owner of the right-of-way in Boxford, The National Grid, has identified several issues of concern that must be resolved before the Town of Boxford and other surrounding towns can enter into an agreement to access the right-of-way and utilize it for recreational purposes. These issues include title and encumbrances, personal, property and environmental liability, operation and maintenance, pathway design and construction, and community support.

A six-question survey was designed to gauge the level of community support, and was distributed to 3229 Boxford households. A 13% response rate was attained with 363 surveys returned. A summary of the survey responses follows.

Answers to these questions were ranked from 1 to 5 with 1 being most important to the Boxford resident. (NB: some questions required more than one response.)

Question 1. Do you or your family members engage in any of the following activities?

Walking, running, jogging	33%
Biking	27%
Horseback riding	4%
Pushing a baby carriage	4%
Skiing, snowshoeing	17%
Walking the dog	16%

Question 2. Where do you live in relation to the proposed trail?

Adjacent	6%
Close, within one half mile	29%
Not close, beyond one half mile	65%

Question 3. What do you think are the benefits of the trail? Rate 1-5: 1 most important, 5 least important.

	1	2	3	4	5
Safe outdoor activity without vehicular traffic	78%	8%	5%	3%	6%
Passage to other towns	18%	11%	24%	10%	38%
Source for recreation, exercise, fitness	61%	22%	8%	3%	6%
Pleasant way to enjoy nature	54%	17%	18%	5%	7%
Sociability, brings community together	21%	19%	25%	11%	23%
Close by and convenient	34%	21%	19%	12%	15%
Provides family activity	41%	19%	17%	12%	11%
Increases real estate values	19%	14%	16%	14%	37%

Question 4. What concerns should the Committee address? Rate 1-5: 1 most important, 5 least important.

	1	2	3	4	5
Screening of the trail	34%	13%	21%	11%	21%
Maintenance and management	70%	16%	7%	3%	4%
Access parking	47%	27%	14%	5%	8%
Rest areas	26%	14%	23%	14%	24%
Etiquette rules	36%	17%	20%	13%	13%
Security-policing	39%	18%	19%	11%	12%

Question 5. Are you in favor of proceeding with the rail-path project?

1-completely in favor	61%
2-very supportive	22%
3-somewhat supportive	11%
4-slightly against	1%
5-firmly against	4%

Question 6. Are you in favor of using CPA funds, with matching grants, to develop the rail-path?

Yes	No
90%	10%

73 surveys included additional comments, and 66 survey respondents volunteered to help bring this project to fruition. Opinions differed about whether the surface of the trail should remain natural or paved, and provisions for multiple access points/leader trails, parking, toilet facilities, and rest areas were all mentioned as needs. Enforcement of safety and etiquette rules, concerns about cost and various funding options, the absence of sidewalks in Boxford, and banning of motorized vehicles on the path were also raised.

In conclusion, the main question the committee hoped to answer through this survey was "Is there community support for creating a rail path in Boxford?" As the compilers of the survey, Richard and Joan Campbell, declared, "The answer is a resounding 'Yes'".

Nancy Merrill, Chair
Marsha Blythe-Brown

Carole Davis
Steve Davis
Andrew Plucinski
Dennis Whittemore.