

The Rail Trail is a Bikeway and a Linear Park: Uphold Concord Tradition and Vote YES on Warrant Article 39

By Sharon McGregor

Concord residents are blessed with special natural and historic treasures and a highly sought-after quality of life. It has long been Concord's tradition to do what is required to preserve these values. It is time to step up to the plate again.

We are at a critical juncture with the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail project. Your presence at Town Meeting is needed for a very important vote that will prevent costly problems we will have to fix later.

At Town Meeting, vote YES on Article 39, to:

- preserve Concord's rural character and quality of life;
- protect sensitive uplands and wetlands through which the trail passes – *including the biologically diverse small wilderness of Jennie Dugan Swamp and the prized natural and recreational resources of White Pond, Warner Pond, and the Assabet River;*
- protect public safety during hours of use, student safety at Sanborn Middle School, safety at rest stops and around the West Concord Train Station, safety associated with allowed speeds and parking, and safe access from the rail trail to expected tourist destinations;
- manage users as usage increases to an estimated hundreds of thousands of people over time; and
- provide for long-term maintenance of the trail, adjacent properties, natural resources and habitats.

You may hear that Article 39 will cause delays in the project. It will not. Both the Warrant Article and its Motion stipulate no delay of actions/schedule for securing project funding and commencing construction.

You may hear that Article 39 duplicates work completed or planned by the Town. It does not. Topics addressed by the article have been discussed, but not resolved and put in a plan, nor will they be in the final design plan.

Article 39 authorizes an Implementation Plan -- a decision document – with decisions that have not been made and need to be made before construction gets underway. What are these decisions?

They are protective measures outside the only minimum requirements of federal and state permits. For natural resources, examples are:

- baseline documentation of the biological diversity and wildlife habitat we wish to protect;
- schedule construction in natural resource areas so as to complete in the shortest time possible, and outside of breeding/nesting season;
- select small-sized equipment for trail clearing and surface construction;

- specify preservation of the tree canopy and minimal tree cutting and root damage;
- minimize soil disturbance/conditions for invasive plants; and
- maximize protection of upland habitat integral with the wetland habitat, and maintain wildlife passage along and across the trail.

For public safety of users and abutters, user management generally, and trail maintenance over the long term, included are:

- comprehensive rules of use, including trail usage and off-trail access restrictions to prevent erosion and otherwise protect the very fragile White Pond, and other sensitive areas;
- enforced speed limits, especially along the natural resource areas;
- judicious use of fencing;
- staffed and budgeted maintenance; and
- careful placement of rest stops (not near Sanborn Middle School)

None of these requirements is in any current or planned written commitment, grant application, contract condition, permit application or permit condition, nor is there any existing means to hold the Town to promises they make.

The Implementation Plan Article 39 authorizes will present these requirements in concise issue-specific management plans. For years, these management plans have been called for by the White Pond Association and concerned residents across town:

- *Natural Resources/Wildlife Habitat Protection and Wildlife Movement Plan* -- for Jennie Dugan Swamp, White Pond, Warner Pond, and along the Assabet River
- *User/People Management Plan* – length of trail, but especially for portions along the above-named natural resources
- *Long-term Trail Maintenance Plan* -- trail path and near trail
- *Public Safety Plan* – length of trail, but especially for the West Concord Depot area, Old Marlboro and Williams Road crossings, Sanborn Middle School, and White Pond

The cost for Article 39 is minimal, compared with the enormous dollars it will save. Town Meeting will be asked to approve \$20,000.

Article 39 will prevent problems that would have to be fixed later, empowering Concord to avoid added costs, keep the rail trail project on schedule, protect highly valued natural resources and associated ecosystems, manage users, ensure public safety, and provide for the long-term maintenance of the trail. Vote YES on Article 39.