



Merrimack Valley
Planning Commission
*plan * develop * promote*

March 31, 2014

Ms. Elizabeth A. Gorski, Chair
Board of Selectmen
Town of Groveland
183 Main Street
Groveland, MA 01834

RE: Proposed Groveland Community Trail

Dear Chairman ^{Betsy} Gorski:

I'm writing to you to convey the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission's continued support for the Groveland Community Trail. The Town, its Open Space and Trails Committee (OSTC), its Community Preservation Committee, and the Town's consultant have done an excellent job of advancing the Trail from a concept to the preliminary design stage.

I've attached a summary description of the MassDOT / Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MVMPO) project development / funding process and a review of the Trail project's strengths from our perspective. I'm offering this description/review for the Town's general information and specifically for the Board of Selectmen and Community Preservation Committee as they consider funding options for final design of the Trail.

We anticipate that the Town may contact MassDOT's District 4 Office to advise of this Project and discuss preparation of a MassDOT Project Need Form (PNF) and associated preliminary design concepts and/or preliminary design for review. Contact Tony Komornick, MVPC Transportation Program Manager should you have any questions or need assistance in this work. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Dennis A. DiZoglio
Executive Director

The MVMPO / TIP Process

Process Overview (source: [MassDOT website](#))

“For most roadway projects, the city or town is responsible for funding and overseeing all facets of the design process, including acquisition of any necessary right-of-way. The project manager works with the community and the design consultant to shepherd the project through the process. Typical milestones in the design process include submission and approval of the 25% design plans, a public hearing on the 25% design, submission, and approval of the 75% design plans, submission, and approval of the 100% design plans, and preparation of the plans, specifications, and estimates (PSE). Concurrent with this process, right-of-way must be acquired and environmental requirements must be satisfied.

A city or town must first contact its MassDOT District Office. Following that, the city or town must prepare a MassDOT Project Need Form (PNF) and submit the PNF to the MassDOT District Office to initiate the process. Assuming the District and the community agree on the merits of the project, the district then submits a Project Initiation Form (PIF) to MassDOT’s Project Review Committee (PRC) for a determination of funding eligibility and project feasibility. If the project is approved by the PRC, it is entered into MassDOT’s internal project information system (ProjectInfo), is assigned a project number, and then is assigned to a project manager.”

Meanwhile, MassDOT provides forecasts of reasonably expected federal transportation funds (and corresponding state matching funds) to each MPO. These forecasts serve as the foundation of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The MPO regions compare this ‘top-down’ information against the ‘bottom-up’ project development process in their communities with the goal of advancing ‘ready-to-go’ projects as TIP ‘space’ becomes available. The most certain FFY of the TIP tends to be the first year, with increased potential variation (project budget increases, schedule adjustments, etc.) in each subsequent TIP year. On occasion, the MPO must amend its TIP one or more times in a FFY to deal with federal and state funding fluctuations, most frequently to accommodate project design, permitting or other issues.

How does the Groveland Community Path fit into this process?

The Groveland Community Path project is a strong proposal, as projects that have a well-defined concept and well-investigated field conditions - as well as design elements tested on projects already implemented - are more likely to advance. Key aspects include:

- The Town has made a strong show of local support by funding the design to 25% to date, and also through its recent land acquisitions (which increase the trail's potential usage and benefits);
- The MVMPO staff has supported the overall project through its Georgetown Branch Shared-Use Path Feasibility Study and sponsorship of the Georgetown Branch Advisory Committee, which meets several times a year to share information among Georgetown, Groveland, and Haverhill trail interests. Staff of the Essex National Heritage Area have also participated on a regular basis;
- The MVMPO is now developing the 2016 Regional Transportation Plan, its FFYs 2016-2019 TIP and FFY 2016 UPWP, all of which are important for the staff's continued participation in the project. The Town is encouraged to convey its interest in the Project to the MVPC Transportation Program Manger;
- Projects like this, which support mode shift and VMT reductions, are consistent with MassDOT's GreenDOT initiative;
- MassDOT and the MVMPO favor projects that link together multiple origins and destinations. This project creates a spine of connectivity among existing public sites and facilities within a compact area. It has independent utility that functions as a stand-alone first phase, and its use will only improve once other bicyclist/pedestrian facilities connect to it;
- The project will be enhanced with the \$6.7 million rehabilitation of MA-97 from the Georgetown line to Parker Street, which includes traffic safety and intersection reconfiguration improvements at School and Salem Streets as well as bicycle and pedestrian improvements. This project will soon be out for construction bids;
- Proponents of this and other trail projects along the former Georgetown Branch as well as the former Newburyport Branch (Border to Boston trail) are working with one utility owner (National Grid), instead of multiple utility companies;
- The Town's consultant (FS&T) has been involved in the design of the Border to Boston Trail, bringing continuity of expertise to an eastern connection, and
- The Town's decision to bring the off-road portion of the project to a higher level of completeness (25%) will enable the Town to advance the project more quickly by avoiding having to petition the Town for additional design funds in 2015. It would also advance the project for nomination to MassDOT Bay State Greenway's Priority 100 Initiative, and makes a strong submittal to MassDOT to begin the project development process.

Regional Connectivity

- MassDOT has already shown support for trail development on other segments of the former Georgetown Branch. For example, the City of Haverhill is developing Phase I of the Bradford Rail Trail (BRT) by the same method, for which construction bids were due on February 12 and construction may begin before the close of FFY 2015. In addition, on March 30, 2015 MassDOT approved the City of Haverhill's request to begin planning for Phase II of the BRT, a 1,100' segment between the Basiliere Bridge and the new playground near the Crescent Yacht Club. Also, the City has had contact with the holding company for the Haverhill Paperboard property and should the property be redeveloped, the City will ensure that the BRT is accommodated.
- MassDOT has a sustained commitment to the Border to Boston project, of which various segments are advancing. In particular, Georgetown has already gained access to a segment of the future trail and has secured a license to begin using and maintaining a path.