

Groveland Community Trail CPC Proposal

Prepared by the Groveland Open Space and Trails Committee



February 3, 2014

Community Preservation Committee
Town of Groveland
183 Main Street
Groveland, MA 01834

Dear Committee Members:

Enclosed is an application prepared by the Groveland Open Space and Trails Committee (OSTC) for Community Preservation (CPA) funding to advance the **Groveland Community Trail** in two key areas of initial design.

The application includes a request for \$150,000 for two important design components:

1. Title work – to be completed by legal counsel to determine deed and title ownership of key segments of the proposed trail, including a utility right-of-way currently operated by National Grid.
2. Field survey, conceptual plan (link: [scope of work](#)) – to be completed by an engineering services firm in coordination with project advocates to determine preferred alternatives and particulars of subsequent design phases. Full scope of work document is attached.

Both components are critical to advancing the project from its current concept phase, and to more fully understand the viability of the project, while mitigating long-term financial risk to the Town of Groveland.

An initial feasibility study performed by the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (link: [PDF](#)) covering the utility right-of-way portion of the proposed trail, was completed in February 2012, finding the project viable from a basic engineering and environmental perspective.

Furthermore, as it was clear in the results of the 2010 Open Space Survey, residents show overwhelming support for recreational development in our Town and have called out this trail as a top priority. We have attached letters of support from respected Town organizations and regional non-profits which further echo this sentiment.

We ask that this committee give careful consideration to our project and allow the conversation to advance by way of a warrant article for the April 2014 Town Meeting, and allow residents to vote on whether or not to commit CPA funds to the project.

Comprehensive details can be found at www.GrovelandCommunityTrail.org.

Sincerely,

Michael Davis
Member, Groveland Open Space and Trails Committee
Groveland Community Trail Project Lead

Alex Johnson
Chairman, Groveland Open Space and Trails Committee

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A. Applicant Information

Name of Applicant: Groveland OSTC
Contact Name: Michael Davis
Mailing Address: 183 Main Street
City: Groveland
State: MA
Zip Code: 01834
Daytime Phone: 603-674-5341
Email Address: md91180@gmail.com

B. Location of Project

- Name of Project: Groveland Community Trail
- Address of Project:
Multiple locations in two segments:
 1. On-road / sidewalk: Main Street, from Town Hall to former Esty Lumber
 2. Off-road: Parcels 42-042-0, 42-062-0, 49-021-0, 24-008-A (the former "Georgetown Branch" rail bed – a utility right-of-way currently operated by National Grid)

C. Funding Information

- CPA Category: (Include all that apply):
 - Open space **Yes**
 - Historic preservation **Yes**
 - Recreation **Yes**
 - Community housing **No**

D. Project Cost

- CPA funds requested in FY 14/15: \$150,000
- CPA funds to be requested in multiple, subsequent years: Estimated \$375,000 total
- MassDOT government funds to be awarded: \$4m to \$5m for construction

E. Project Information

1. Description

A proposed 3.25 mile, shared-use, non-motorized path – on-road from Town Hall to former Esty Lumber, continuing off-road, along utility ROW, to its intersection with King Street – connecting multiple town assets and resources in the near term, and creating a future opportunity to unite Groveland with a larger regional trail network.

2. Goals

To create a lasting resource for our community; to connect multiple community assets (e.g., Bagnall School, Perry Park Nursery School, Center Street Greenway, Shanahan Field, Pines Recreation Area, Town Hall Complex, Haverhill via Bates Bridge) by an alternative mode of transportation (i.e., walking, biking, other outdoor activity); to create positive experiences for residents of all ages & abilities with scenic, healthy, and safe year-round transportation & recreation; to develop an opportunity to connect into a larger, vibrant regional trail network, most notably the Border to Boston Trail ([link](#)) in Georgetown, which is currently under development.

To enrich the lives of all ages and all abilities: any serious or casual outdoor enthusiast (e.g., walkers, joggers, bicyclists, families with children in strollers, cross-country skiers, snow-shoers, wheelchair users) and/or anyone looking for alternative modes of transportation to multiple schools & recreational fields, municipal facilities, other open space, and Haverhill commercial resources (i.e., Rivers Edge Plaza) via Bates Bridge.

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3. Community Need

As the 2010 Open Space Survey (link: [PDF](#)) overwhelmingly indicated, residents are passionate about preserving and developing open space for recreational purposes. Most notably:

- **Question 12** which asked "*Please check off the top five recreation facilities you feel are needed*" whereas more than 55% of respondents specifically listed what was then referred to as the "rail trail on old railroad bed" as a priority (**#1 of 20 options**).
- **Question 4a** which asked "*How important is it to you to preserve open space for recreation purposes?*" whereas over 85% responded "Somewhat Important" or "Very Important" (22% and 63% respectively).

There exists a vibrant regional & national movement beyond Groveland to transform abandoned rail and utility corridors into places of healthy, scenic and safe community recreation. The geography of our town sits uniquely between two high-priority MassDOT-funded trail projects (i.e., Border To Boston ([link](#)), Merrimack River Trail ([link](#)) as well as a neighbor-community effort in the Bradford Rail Trail ([link](#)).

Therefore, not only will this project connect multiple Town assets (i.e., school, recreation, commercial, municipal), it will also link our town with a larger, prioritized regional effort, while keeping Groveland on par with a movement that extends well beyond the borders of our own community.

The Master Plan for the Town of Groveland makes a clear case for the Groveland Community Trail by stipulating the need for better and alternative transportation. Chapter 8 of the Town's Master Plan discusses transportation and stipulates that the primary goal should be to "Construct and maintain a town-wide transportation system that provides for safe and efficient movement of goods and people, and meets the travel needs of all citizens." The second of three policies established to fulfill that goal is to "Encourage alternative and energy conserving modes of transportation including walking and biking".

The plan then lays out 6 specific proposed actions to work towards the goal including #1 "*Design a town-wide transportation plan that includes roads, public transit, truck routes, bikeways, equestrian and hiking trails,*" and #3 "*Insure the availability of sidewalks and handicapped access where needed for pedestrian access to public facilities.*" As the trail would facilitate pedestrian, biking and hiking activities, including enhanced handicapped transportation and access to a number of town facilities, the Groveland Community Trail would help to directly satisfy a number of town's transportation needs and objectives as laid out in the Master Plan.

4. Community Support

In addition to the encouraging results of the 2010 Open Space Survey results noted above, initial public and regional support has been strong.

Letters of support (attached) have been provided by the Groveland Conservation Commission, Groveland OSTC, the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, and Essex National Heritage.

Additionally, over 50 residents have "Liked" our Facebook page as of January 27, 2014. Since the page's launch on January 1, 2014, promotion efforts have been minimal and "Likes" have been mainly organic to date. The OSTC is confident that when fully leveraged, Facebook will be a driving force in growing awareness and rallying resident support.

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5. Timeline

If the requested warrant article is approved on February 3, 2014 and a YES vote achieved in April 2014 Town Meeting, the OSTC would immediately commission the following work:

1. **Title work** – to be completed by legal counsel to determine deed and title ownership of key segments of the proposed trail, including a right of way currently operated by National Grid.
2. **Field survey, conceptual plan** (link: [fully detailed proposal](#)) – to be completed by an engineering services firm in coordination with project advocates to determine preferred alternatives and particulars of subsequent design phases.

Critical milestones for requested FY14/15 CPA funds:

- **February 3, 2014:** CPC vote to create warrant article for April 2014 Town Meeting to commit \$150,000 of CPA funds for title work, field survey and conceptual plan
- **April 2014:** Town Meeting vote to approve CPA funds
- **After July 1, 2014:** Commission title work with legal counsel
- **Post title work (pending no complications):** commission field survey & conceptual plan (est. 2H 2014 or 1H 2015)
- **Concurrently,** the OSTC is engaging National Grid's real estate division for early negotiation re: an appropriate long term lease to operate a recreational trail on their ROW.

Future milestones for yet-to-be-asked-for CPA funds (if previous milestones are achieved as estimated):

1. **April 2015 Town Meeting:** Vote for remaining 25% design funds (est. \$170,000)
2. **Estimated 2016:** Complete "25% design"
3. **Thereafter (est. 2016):** Submit 25% design to MassDOT to obtaining Project Review Committee approval and secure project tracking number
4. **Thereafter (est. 2016/17):** Project inserted in MassDOT TIP schedule
5. **Estimated 2017 Town Meeting:** Vote for funds to complete 75% design (est. \$100,000)
6. **Thereafter (est. 2017/18):** Complete "75% design"
7. **Estimated 2018 Town Meeting:** Vote for funds to complete 100% design (est. \$100,000)
8. **Thereafter (est. 2018/19):** Complete "100% design"
9. **Thereafter (est. 2019/20):** Final construction funding approval from MassDOT
10. **Estimated 2020:** Finalize National Grid lease
11. **Estimated 2020/21:** Granted MASS DOT TIP Funding
12. **Thereafter (est. 2020/21):** Begin construction
13. **Estimated 2023 or before:** Completed Groveland Community Trail

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Implementation / Project Management

Groveland OSTC members Michael Davis and Alex Johnson (Chair) will continue leading as project managers. Both have demonstrated a passion for this project, have developed strong community and regional support networks, and are more than capable to continuing advancing the project in a direction of success.

The OSTC will, of course, continue to engage the appropriate elected and appointed Town officials (e.g., Board of Selectmen Conservation Commission, Planning Board), and when the time is right, the public at large to guide and influence the engineering design process to ensure the trail is built to our residents' desired standards.

GPI, Inc. has been critical in providing the OSTC with no-fee guidance and resources through the initial concept stages of this project proposal and we feel GPI, Inc is well-suited to complete all design requirements, with its proven ability to adhere to the stringent requirements of the MassDOT design and funding approval processes. GPI, Inc also stands ready to help our Town navigate an impactful and relevant public awareness campaign over the next many months. Full GPI, Inc qualifications and relevant experiences are listed in their earlier-mentioned [scope of work](#) for "10% design" and "25% design" .

6. Success Factors

Success initially will be defined as achieving the critical milestones outlined in the *Timeline* section above.

The OSTC believes strongly that if the CPC votes to approve the warrant article, we would be more than capable of getting the word out to the town's citizens about this project and all of its benefits, and building a coalition of vocal supporters to result in a "YES" vote in the April 2014 Town Meeting. **Therefore, ultimately, the #1 success factor is a YES vote at April Town Meeting to approve CPA funds (\$150,000) which will reaffirm the town's appetite, desire and commitment to undertake this project.**

If a YES vote is achieved at April 2014 Town Meeting, we would immediately commission the title work – pending no complications, we'd then immediately commission the field survey and conceptual design planning. **Therefore, the #2 success factor is a clean title search and the ability to then formally kick off the design work with our chosen engineering partner.**

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7. Budget

The total estimated funding requirement for this project is upwards of \$4m-\$5m (the vast majority paid for via MassDOT government funds). CPA funds would be applied directly to design costs and title work. Estimates are as follows:

1. **Groveland must (to be awarded MassDOT construction funds) pay for:**
 1. Title work – estimated to be no more than \$25,000 (*all funds requested in this Feb 3, 2014 warrant article proposal*)
 2. All design costs – approximately \$500,000 (*\$125,000 of which is requested in this this February 3, 2014 warrant article proposal*) (see critical milestones in Timeline section for additional details.)
2. **MassDOT would then pay for:** all construction costs (appx. \$4m-\$5m) through their Transportation Improvement Planning and Project Development Process.

8. Other Funding and Maintenance

At this stage, the OSTC has not aggressively pursued other funding sources because of MassDOT's mandate that 100% of design costs be paid for by the Town (to demonstrate project commitment) in order to then commit 100% of the construction costs.

At a later date, however, we will engage multiple avenues for funding sources and volunteer recruitment for things like maintenance and beautification. For example, at a minimum, we plan to host an annual Community Day on the trail to remove basic debris, waste, and organic growth, while continuing public engagement and creating a sense of ownership for our residents.

Beyond basic volunteer efforts, many options exist, with common practices including mile marker sponsorships (e.g., [in Danvers](#)), adopt a trail sponsorships (e.g., [in Salisbury](#)) and reduced-cost partnerships with groups like the [SCA Massachusetts Americorps](#) to provide skilled and motivated work crews for periods of 5 or 10 days to complete basic trail maintenance. Georgetown, for example, worked with their Board of Selectmen to include a minimal amount for some basic maintenance in their Town's annual budget.

As encouraged by Essex National Heritage "*trail stewards are repeatedly surprised by the number and type of people who offer assistance (time, money, equipment) after the trail is built*" and the OSTC is confident in Groveland residents living up to that standard.

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9. Resources

For the most information about the project, visit: www.GrovelandCommunityTrail.org

Full GPI, Inc. proposal for 10% and 25% design studies: [Scope of Services](#)

Groveland Community Trail Facebook Page: www.Facebook.com/GrovelandCommunityTrail

2010 Groveland Open Space Survey: [Full Results](#)

10. Include documentation that shows you have control or plan to gain control over the site, such as Purchase and Sales Agreement, option, or deed.

1. With respect to the "on road" portion along Main Street, we would be relying solely on public roads and sidewalks already controlled by the town of Groveland.
2. With respect to the utility right-of-way portion, as is typical for projects that include large portions of a utility-owned right-of-way, the right to develop and utilize the ROW as a trail is a lengthy process – one that typically and gradually, however, ends with the applicant's permission to use the right-of-way being granted.

Initial title work and some planning must be performed before the town may acquire a short term license. The license would permit formal access and use of the ROW in its current state as well as the performance of limited maintenance along the ROW. Further planning and design is required before the town would be able to acquire a long term (eg 99 year) lease which would permit the town to construct the trail and fully utilize the space.

Georgetown is the most relevant example as having done just this with National Grid in the past couple of years for their segment of the Border to Boston Trail project.

Members of the OSTC along with Jason DeGray of GPI, Inc met with National Grid's real-estate representative on January 27th, Steven Towle. Steven indicated that this project is entirely feasible and would help facilitate the necessary collaboration and conversations to work towards a long-term lease agreement. A conceptual design, once completed by the engineer, would be submitted for National Grid's review – from there, an iterative dialogue ensues to design and construct a mutually beneficial recreational trail. From the discussion, title work, presumably, will not be a concern.