

Winter Newsletter 2010

Dear Friend of the Farmington Canal Rail-Trail:

Thank you for visiting the trail this year. For more than 20 years our organization has been building reality out of what was once a dream. Nine miles of trail were added this year between New Haven, CT and Northampton, MA, for a total of more than 52 miles of off-road path or 64% of the total length. I invite you to explore this extraordinary resource, which would not exist without your support.

The goals of our group may sound prosaic – to build an off-road path along the route of the abandoned railroad and former canal. But beyond trail construction and maintenance, the mission is really to connect us with ourselves, each other and with our history. I'd like to think that the trail instills in users a sense of enlightening and expansive connection – between diverse people in the present, who enjoy the trail today, and with those who came before and contributed to our region's rich heritage.

These twin themes have played out in abundance this year. In concert with a feisty organization called 350.org, which is working to combat global warming worldwide, FCRTTA hosted a trail clean-up in the Newhallville section of the trail in New Haven and Hamden that drew scores of volunteers from all walks of life. It was uplifting to greet so many who care about the trail and are dedicated to its success. Suburbanites joined Latin American and African American families and local church groups to haul out trash and overgrowth from the trail in exchange for bike bells, pretzels and cider on a sunny afternoon. Similar work parties were in action worldwide on 10.10.10. Besides helping us connect our future in a warming world and with all the communities who use the trail, it also links us with our past. The Hamden Lockkeeper's House at Lock 14 has undergone a restoration and will be open to the public starting in 2011 on weekends when the trail gets a lot of use.

The trail is the touchstone for countless events and outings, formal and informal. It feeds our spirit. Comments on Facebook about a ride on the trail organized by a biking group observed "sweet canal ride," with a response, "that was rockin'!" As it grows in length and word spreads, it will attract even more users from farther away, and that's great for building support for trails generally and for bringing tourism dollars into the region. There are still many challenges, including the fact that Connecticut devotes very few dollars relative to other states to trails. The new incoming political leadership holds some promise for turning this situation around. Our growing connections with other groups who also advocate for progressive transportation should help, too, in strengthening trail support in CT.

As a member, you're an essential part of our work, sustaining a historic legacy and building a constituency for non-motor recreation and commuting. This work seems incremental, but it is ultimately transformational, and we will prevail with your help.



Lisa Fernandez, President

FARMINGTON CANAL HERITAGE GREENWAY - UPDATE ON PROGRESS, Cont'd.



Southington Trail



New 180-foot Bridge in Northampton Sep 26, 2010



Hamden Lockkeeper's House Developments

The Hamden Lockkeeper's House at Lock #14, one of only two such structures remaining in the state, has been refurbished and will be open, at least part-time, for the benefit of trail users. The house has a restroom, an outside water fountain, and, eventually, a police substation for the Hamden bike patrol. We have worked with the Hamden Historical Society to develop a small museum focused on the history of the canal and the railroad. The official dedication was on November 18, 2010. Volunteers from our organization will likely open the facility and be on site during the summer, probably on weekends. If you have any ideas about possible additions to the museum or want to assist in staffing, please contact Norman Thetford (nthetford@att.net).

In addition to the dedication of the Lockkeeper's House, two additional grants were announced by the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation for an architectural survey of the remains of Lock #14 with an eye towards its possible restoration (similar to Lock #12 in Cheshire). Lock #14 was also the site of a guard lock, which was designed to prevent catastrophic flooding due to the relatively steep grade from that point down to the harbor.

News on Individual Sections of the Trail

- 1. New Haven:** The New Haven portion of the trail is now complete from Hillhouse Ave. to the Hamden town line, although construction continues on the improvements to the bridges over the trail at Prospect St., Hillhouse Ave. and Temple St. (funded in part by Yale University). The conceptual design for Phase IV, the final section south to the waterfront is complete, and the city expects to sign an agreement for the detailed design by year end. If that occurs on schedule, requests for construction bids could go out within a year, as funding is available.
- 2. Hamden:** The design of the tunnel under Skiff Street, which will replace the grade crossing at that point, is complete and awaiting final review and approval by the Connecticut DOT. Barring delays, bids will be requested and construction will start in early 2011.
- 3. Cheshire:** Cheshire has reached agreement with Dalton Industries on an easement through their property, and has also received a Recreational Trail Grant to help in the construction. The town's residents rejected a proposal to fund construction of the trail north of West Main Street solely from the town's resources, but a design for the crossing at West Main St. has been approved by CTDOT.
- 4. Southington:** Construction is essentially complete on the next two-mile section south (towards Cheshire) from the portion that was completed in 2005 to Plantsville (see picture above). One company, SRS, has agreed to construct a half-mile section of the remaining portion. A formal dedication ceremony for the latest section will be held in the spring of 2011.

FARMINGTON CANAL HERITAGE GREENWAY - UPDATE ON PROGRESS, Cont'd.

5. **Plainville:** The Plainville Greenway Alliance has been working with town officials and the design firm of Milone & MacBroom. The town now has a design outlining the preferred route through town that doesn't conflict with the active railroad. The southern section will be a combination of on-road along low-volume, low speed roads along with open space parcels; the northern section will be a combination of on-road and original railroad right-of-way. The railroad is willing to abandon the right-of-way from Northwest Drive to the Pequabuck River, and the CT DEP has funds to purchase it; negotiations will start shortly. Trail construction is likely to start there first.
6. **Farmington:** Construction is now complete in Farmington from Red Oak Hill Road north to the Avon line. Farmington will be starting the process of getting quotes for the design and construction of the last section south from Red Oak Hill Road to Cronk Road in Plainville. That will ensure the connection of Plainville to the northern half of the trail.
7. **Avon:** Avon's section of the trail is complete, and mileposts have been installed in cooperation with Farmington and Simsbury. The zero marker is at Red Oak Hill Rd. and increases going north. Once the trail is complete all the way to New Haven, we plan to initiate a project to re-mark the entire trail, starting from Long Wharf in New Haven.
8. **Simsbury:** The final 1.8-mile section of the trail, from Stratton Brook Rd. through Hazel Meadows and past the Ensign-Bickford Company to Drake Hill Rd., is now complete. Previously, the proposed trail had to detour twice that distance through city streets to get to the completed section.
9. **East Granby:** Construction is now complete in East Granby with the installation of the Salmon Brook Bridge and the re-alignment of the trail around the Imperial Nurseries (and partially into Granby).
10. **Suffield:** With the refurbishment of several former railroad bridges, construction is now complete in Suffield as well, all the way to the state line.
11. **Southwick, MA:** Construction of Phase 2, from Point Grove Rd. to the Westfield line was finished in October, with the exception of a flashing light at Rt. 57. With that done, Southwick's trail is now complete from the Connecticut line to the Westfield line, a total of about 6.2 miles.
12. **Westfield, MA:** Construction of the section of trail through Westfield, about 3.2 miles, has been delayed due to funding issues and the installation of a sewer line, now under construction. The trail has been designed and will utilize nine bridges going through Westfield. The city is planning to build a short section from Shaker Road to meet the recently completed Southwick trail.
13. **Southampton, MA:** There is still resistance from some residents; but a group, "Friends of the Southampton Greenway," has begun to meet on a regular basis. The idea of a greenway based on the right-of-way of the former railroad has been included in the town's recently completed Open Space Master Plan. The State has earmarked funds for the purchase of the right-of-way, and the Pioneer Valley Railroad has stated its willingness to hold the land until the town is ready to go forward with the project. The success of the first Easthampton section should help to move the process along.
14. **Easthampton, MA:** Construction is complete on the first section of the Manhan Trail, from South Street to Route 5, about 4.2 miles. Part of this trail lies on the right-of-way of the New Haven to Northampton Railroad and will ultimately become part of the Heritage Trail. The town has also started construction on the link from Ferry St. to the new bridge at Northampton.
15. **Northampton, MA:** Construction has started on the portion of the New Haven to Northampton Railroad right-of-way that connects the Norwottuck Trail in the northeast to the Manhan Trail in the south. Construction included a new 180-foot long bridge over Route 10 (see pictures above) that required closing the highway for most of the day on September 26, a Sunday. This phase will include the junction of the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail (from the south), the Norwottuck Trail (from the east), and the Northampton Bicycle Path (from the west).

FARMINGTON CANAL HERITAGE GREENWAY - UPDATE ON PROGRESS, Cont'd.

JOINT TRAIL MAP PROJECT: Our Association is working with the Farmington Valley Trails Council to develop a comprehensive map of the entire trail in Connecticut. The goal is to have a consistent presentation of the entire route, with distances, key features, parking sites and trail status clearly indicated. Our goal is to have this project complete this winter so that maps with the latest data will be available in the spring.

WEBSITE: As several of you have noted, we have had some problems with the website due to the failure of the original developer and hosting organization. We will be retaining a new developer this winter and hope to have a new site up by the spring.

USEFUL LINKS: East Coast Greenway: www.ecg.org Bike Walk CT: www.wecyclect.org
Farmington Valley Trails Council: www.fvtc.org FCRTTA: www.farmingtoncanal.org

TRAIL MARKERS: Frequent users of the trail may have noted that various types of mileage markers occur in several areas. Farmington and Avon have combined to set markers northbound, starting at Red Oak Hill Road. Hamden and Cheshire start at the joint town boundary, with Cheshire marking northbound and Hamden marking southbound. Hamden has one-tenth mile markers and has also color-coded each quarter-mile section to help users identify their location in the event emergency help is needed. For map enthusiasts, the Google map program now shows greenways, including parts of this trail, which can be helpful in planning a bike trip.

THANK YOU!

Hundreds of Association members generously contribute to our organization and provide virtually *all* of our financial support. We are very grateful for your response to our annual membership campaign. We appreciate not only our faithful regular contributors but also new members and those who have resumed support. We like to think this reflects your understanding that the Association continues to be an effective advocate for rail-trail construction.

As in the past, Association leaders remain involved as significant advocates of Farmington Canal Rail-to-Trail activities at both state and local levels. Your continued, generous support enables the organization to pursue our ultimate goal of an 84-mile trail from New Haven to Northampton, MA, connecting with other major trails at those and intermediate points. If you would like to participate more actively in this stimulating process, please contact Norm Thetford: at: nthetford@att.net, or write the Association at the address below. Thanks for your help!

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