
Bridging the gap

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BELMONT - The town will be creating a new recreational trail, and on Wednesday a covered bridge was brought up from the city of Dover to be used as a pathway to cross the Tioga River.

According to Woody Fogg, who has worked closely with the project and was at the Public Works department assisting in the bridge's delivery, the bridge was sold to the Belmont Conservation Commission for \$1 this past summer. The bridge will be used in two locations to cross the river as part of a recreational trail, which Conservation Commission Chair Ken Knowlton hopes will be used by many throughout the community.

"We are hoping that it will be used by people during all four seasons," Knowlton said.

Fogg explained that the bridge being used is actually fairly new, designed by H.E. Bergeron in North Conway, and was erected in Dover about a decade ago. The bridge has not been used for several years, and the Conservation Commission felt that it might fit its needs. The commission spoke with the Dover City Council and they were willing to sell it, but Belmont needed to take it away.

According to Fogg, idea sparked from the Belmont Revitalization Committee, as well as a design charette two years ago that was set to explore and brainstorm how to make the downtown area more aesthetic. He said that one aspect of the project was to create a pavilion next to the Belmont Mill for activities like Old Home Day and for people to congregate. He explained that they looked at an old railroad depot across the river and decided to talk to its owner, who later donated it. Fogg said that the idea was to make a foot bridge to connect for overflow parking on the other side of the river during events. However, through brainstorming they thought about creating a recreational trail.

In the end, he said that the trail will go about two to three miles from downtown Belmont to South Street. Fogg added that an idea for the trail is to have it eventually link up to the town forest, but he added they are taking one thing at a time. The donated railroad right-of-way goes all the way up the Tioga River. The trail is made up of the old rail bed and old sewer lines.

The issue, Fogg said, was that they needed to cross the river. He explained that there was once an old foot bridge for crossing the Tioga River, but it was washed away in a flood in 1936.

Conservation Commission Chair Ken Knowlton explained that the original plan was for another metal bridge, but it had lead paint. Fortunately, according to Fogg, they found the bridge for sale last year. While he said that they did not need all 150 feet of the bridge for a 50-foot span, they decided that it could be cut into three segments for usage. One section will go behind the Belmont Mill and the other two will be put together for a long, 100-foot span to cross the river.

The Leslie Roberts Company, manned by Mark Roberts and his two sons Matt and Jeff, brought a piece of the covered bridge to the Public Works yard, which will be its home for the winter. Knowlton said that the plan is to place the section of the bridge across the river just before the Belmont Mill in the spring. The other sections will be placed somewhere in the vicinity in 2015. While the price for the bridge was low, funding is still needed to transport the bridge to Belmont and other maintenance.

Knowlton was appreciative of the Roberts family, which hails from Belmont, for submitting a bid to the town that he said there was absolutely no way anyone could beat. They brought the bridge to the yard and also used a crane to lift it to its winter location. Knowlton said that while the cost is very cheap, it will need to be done again to bring the other pieces.

"The Conservation Commission is always looking for more money, more grants, more donations," said Knowlton. "This is a non-profit organization, and we're going to need funds."

Fogg said that the town is always looking for donations, and added that his wife recently wrote a Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant for approximately \$90,000 that was accepted, and will help with costs and materials.

Knowlton said that the Belmont selectmen and Town Administrator Jeanne Beaudoin have been behind the project the whole time.

"She and the selectmen have been great," said Knowlton. "Everyone is excited about this."

Knowlton said that residents of the town have donated their hard work, money, land and ideas to get the project done, which has been a major help.

"When you have this level of volunteerism in town, and have families like the Roberts giving the best service for the very least cost, it really helps us out a lot," said Knowlton.

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A COVERED bridge from Dover was recently moved to Belmont as part of the revitalization plan in Belmont Village. Crews are seen here off loading the last section of the bridge Wednesday.



JEFF ROBERTS, left, and Matt Roberts from Leslie Roberts, LLC prepare to remove a covered bridge from the back of a semi-trailor. The bridge was purchased from the city of Dover for \$1 and will be used in the Belmont Village revitalization plan.

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