IT HAS BEEN a long road, but it finally seems like construction of the Winnipesaukee Scenic Trail will begin in late August or early September. (left to right) Rob Bolduc with his dog Goldie, Pat Bolduc, Ron Mitchell, Bob Bolduc and Rick Ball

BELMONT — It has been about 15 years since talks began about the Winnisquam Scenic Trail, and on Friday officials said the ball has been rolling quickly of late with construction expected to begin in late August or early September.

Belmont Land Use Technician Rick Ball admits that over the years there have been plenty of hurdles regarding the trail, but he said if all goes according to plan, but he was pleased to see things finally coming to fruition.

Phase one of the trail amounts to about 1.7 miles and eventually the plan is for the Belmont portion of the trail to connect to the WOW Trail in Laconia and Winnipesaukee River Trail, which goes through the city of Franklin.

The first phase of the Winnisquam Scenic Trail, also called the Winni Trail, will run from the Laconia city line to a stretch of sidewalk along Route 3. It will then cross between two trees near Leslie E. Roberts Drive and will turn in to the woods, where there were once plans to have an
extension of the Route 3 Bypass. The trail will then run along the railroad tracks, across an easement by Sun Lake Village, and will then turn at Osborne’s Agway. It will be about 10 feet wide and, like the WOW Trail, it will be paved.

Ball said about $180,000 has been spent on engineering and the rest of the project will be roughly $700,000 for construction and oversight engineering for phase one. They will need to put out for bid for construction of the trail, which will include paving, fencing and trimming the weeds and brush.

The total project is budgeted for $954,765 with $763,812 being paid for through a Federal Highway Administration Grant. Another $25,000 will come from the New Hampshire Bicycle and Pedestrian Grant Program, while the town is responsible for the remaining $165,953.

Ball said there are a number of side projects to widen the sidewalk to meet with phase two of the WOW Trail, which he said is also expected to be built in the fall.

“The goal of this whole exercise is to get from downtown Meredith to the northern trail in Franklin,” said Ball. “Tilton is about ready to start going north of Route 140 to connect down on Silver Lake Road in Tilton.

One major step in the process is getting easements from landowners along the trail. On Friday a check was presented to Bob Bolduc who owns Piche’s Ski and Sport Shops. Ball explained that it is a slope easement, as some of the side slopes go onto his property. He said he has acknowledgements from all of the other easements and was hoping to get them signed in the coming days.

“These easements are the final step before we go to turning in for the plan specification and estimate to the state and federal Highway Administration,” said Ball. “They review it, then we advertise for construction for three weeks. It takes another week for them to review the contract, appropriate the money and then we can start.”

Piche’s has a location on Daniel Webster Highway in Belmont and some of their land resides where the trail will eventually be. Bolduc said he is “150 percent” in favor of building the trail, and the money received through the easement he intends to donate back to the trail. Bolduc said during the month of July, Piche’s will hold a yard sale to promote the trail. He is very excited for the trail’s completion.

“It’s going to be a very successful trail,” said Bolduc.

The project was first proposed in 2000, according to Ron Mitchell who chairs the Belmont Recreation and Alternative Transportation Team. Original approval for the project from the N.H. DOT’s Transportation Enhancement Program came a year later. Ball said the project needs to be done this fiscal year because it is the end of the Transportation Enhancement Program.

Ball explained that originally there was approval for phase two of the project, which would have gone from Route 3 to Jefferson Road, but because of inflation in construction prices they had to take money from it and put it in phase one.

Mitchell said there may have been frustration over the years, but they never gave up on the vision. Ball agreed, saying while there were times he didn’t think the trail would ever happen, he is excited to finally see a light at the end of the tunnel.

“I can’t imagine seeing the first shovel turned over,” Ball said. “It’s going to be amazing.”