

NEWS²

Belmont ready to break ground on Lake Winnisquam Scenic Trail

BELMONT — Ground will be broken early next week for Phase I of the Lake Winnisquam Scenic Trail according to Rick Ball, Belmont Land Use technician.

Ball says the 1.8-mile long trail will extend from the Agway store on Rte. 3 near the Mosquito Bridge to the Laconia city line. It will run behind the Belknap Mall and will provide walking and bicycle route into Laconia and will cost \$726,278 — 80 percent of which is being reimbursed by a N.H. Department of Transportation Alternative Highway Grant.

He said \$99,012 has been set aside to provide engineering and oversight for the project, which has been in the works for about 12 years and is part of a Transportation Enhancement Program funded through state and federal highway money.

The phase 1 pathway will mostly run in the railway right-of-way, along the shore of Lake Winnisquam. A chain link fence along the trail, separating the pathway from the railroad tracks, will cost about \$200,000, according to Ball.

Nelson Companies of Center Conway has been awarded the contract for the project with HEB Engineers, Inc. of North Conway doing the engineering.

Ball said that work will continue to around Thanksgiving this year and that the 10-foot wide paved walkway will be completed in the Spring of 2016. When completed the trail will link up with Phase 2 of the Winnepesaukee-Opechee-Winnisquam (WOW) trail in Laconia, which will extend from Veterans Square to the Belmont town line and provide nearly four consecutive miles of walking and biking trails in the two communities.

Alan Beetle, president of the WOW Trail, says he anticipates that bids for the project will be sought by the end of the year with work getting underway next Spring.

Two obstacles that have slowed construction of the stretch from Veterans Square to Belmont were overcome recently.

The New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (DES) granted the wetlands permit required to cross Durkee Brook in the vicinity of Bartlett Beach. The permit was required for the grading and filling necessary to provide drainage for the trail, replace an existing culvert, construct a boardwalk and build a 26-foot bridge over the brook.

Meanwhile, finessing a way past two abandoned wooden sheds along the railway just north of Water Street, had hindered the final design of Phase 2 of the trail for months. The New Hampshire Bureau of Rails designated the sheds, which have been neither used nor maintained since regular rail traffic ceased years ago, as "historic" structures to be preserved not demolished. Since the sheds stand in the route of trail through the railroad right-of-way, a way around them had to be found.

Beetle said that negotiations were opened with Lionel Labonte of Stratham Tire, which owns the property surrounding the sheds, for easement that would allow the trail to bypass them. Last December, before agreement was reached, Labonte passed away. However, Beetle said that Labonte's daughter, Denise Littlefield, who succeeded her father at the firm, has offered to donate enough land to the city to bend the trail around the sheds. That donation has not yet been finalized.

He said that the WOW Trail has approximately \$750,000 in hand, including \$400,000 appropriated by the city, and has already funded the design and engineering portion of the project.

Phase I of the WOW Trail extends from Lakeport Square south to North Main Street, again largely following railroad tracks.