

Andover Patch

Proposed Merrimack River Trail Will Link Communities With Andover

A proposed recreational trail along the Merrimack River would link Andover to 17 communities.

By [Cindy Bernstein](#) | May 31, 2011

The [Essex National Heritage Commission](#) and the [Merrimack Valley Planning Commission](#) (MVPC) recently announced a partnership project focused on developing the Merrimack Valley River Trail linking six cities and 11 towns from Tyngsborough to Newbury including an existing stretch through Andover.

"The cost of the strategic planning phase of the project is about \$19,000 with the majority (80 percent) funded from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreational grant," said Deb Payson, spokesperson for Essex Heritage.

Payson explained the final report is expected to be issued in the Fall and will document existing trails as well as locate where trails can be developed.

"The goal," Payson said, "is to promote regionalism by connecting the communities along the river to develop a continuous non-motorized on and off road trail system."

The trail is set to run 50 miles through 17 towns and cities in the state including Tyngsborough, Dracut, Chelmsford, Lowell, Tewksbury, Andover, Methuen, Lawrence, North Andover, Haverhill, Groveland, Merrimac, West Newbury, Amesbury, Newburyport, Salisbury, and Newbury.

In Andover, there are two segments of trails totaling 5.5 miles in length. [Andover Village Improvement Society](#) (AVIS) owns and maintains the 3.3 miles of trails west of Interstate 93 to the Tewksbury line as part of the Deer Jump and Spalding Reservations.

The Town Conservation Commission oversees the 2.2 mile Merrimack River Trail from the Minuteman Park continuing under Interstate 93 east to the Lawrence city line.

"A trail from Tyngsborough to Newbury has been talked about for many years. It would be nice to see it happen," AVIS President Fred Snell said.

Although there are several access points, both trails can be reached by Launching Road, Brundrett Avenue off River Road or the [Wyndham Hotel](#) parking lot, which is the closest to the river, according to Snell.

Andover's representative for the Merrimack Valley project is Jacki Byerly, town planner. She explained that Andover's existing trails "are already in good shape." Byerly did point out that the MVPC will determine if any improvements will need to be made to the existing dirt paths.

She said once the Merrimack River trail plan report is released there will be group meetings involving residents, but added they had not yet set a timeline for the project.

Snell said that that the Andover Committee of the [Appalachian Mountain Club](#) (AMC) runs hikes in the local area most weekends from September through June. Snell will be leading one Sunday, June 19. The listing of all the hikes are listed on their [website](#).

Persons interested in obtaining more information about the trails project can contact Essex Heritage [website](#) or call 978-740-0444 or MVPC [website](#) or call 978-374-0519.