

Planners expanding Merrimack River trail

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PLANNERS EXPANDING MERRIMACK RIVER TRAIL

The Essex National Heritage Commission and the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission are working together to further develop the Merrimack River Trail, a long envisioned 50-mile multimodal recreational trail along the Merrimack River.

The strategic planning project entails the engagement of trail advocates and municipal officials in the 17 Massachusetts communities that line the Merrimack River, including Andover.

"With the goal of promoting increased use of the Merrimack River Trail, the project seeks to build upon prior efforts by improving connections between existing sections," according to a release. "Tracing the river's route, the trail will ultimately connect six cities and 11 towns from Tyngsborough to Newbury, effectively creating the backbone of a continuous, non-motorized, on-and off-road trail system."

Funded with a Recreational Trails Grant from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, the early stage planning effort entails documenting existing and potential routes and preparing recommendations regarding the trail's future development. The project is being conducted in cooperation with the Merrimack River Watershed Council and Northern Middlesex Council of Governments.

"This collaboration between Essex Heritage, the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, and the Merrimack River communities is a critical step towards creating a regional partnership to support the long-term development of the Merrimack River Trail" said Annie C. Harris, executive director of Essex National Heritage Commission.

Essex Heritage and MVPC will organize and facilitate a series of meetings with trail proponents and community officials to undertake a needs assessment and route identification process. A final report containing maps, findings, and recommendations will be available by early fall.

For more information, contact Essex Heritage at 978-740-0444 or MVPC at 978-374-0519.