

[REDACTED]
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Southampton, Massachusetts 01073

May 16, 2008

Dear Fellow Abutter and Concerned Citizen:

The upcoming May 20, 2008 Southampton Town Meeting will include various warrant articles and expenditures from our Community Preservation Fund. While most of these projects are worthy of your support, and benefit the Town without infringing on the property rights of others, there are two articles on the warrant which once again are an attempt to by a select few to lead Southampton down a path to constructing a rail trail through the heart of Southampton, and through the backyards of many. Now is the time to take a stand and put an end to this frivolous and intrusive project.

Like many of you, the proposed rail trail linking Easthampton and Westfield will literally run right through our back yard and forever destroy the privacy and serenity of our property. While rail trails are acceptable in concept, they should never require a homeowner and taxpayer to suffer the consequences so that some people can ride their bikes. For those of you who live on Brickyard Road, do not be fooled or lulled into a false sense of security by claims from the Friends of the Greenway that there is "no current plan" to cross Route 10; on the contrary, there always has been and exists a plan to connect rail trails throughout the Commonwealth and to link into Connecticut, and the only way to connect Easthampton to Westfield is to cross Route 10. Just like the robber who just sticks his foot in a closing door "just to talk," this is merely the first step between driving a stake through the heart of this Community.

The concerns regarding this project are many, and certainly extend beyond the abutters, who will have no privacy if this project is approved, and will never be able to enjoy their backyards, or to let your children play in your own backyard without having to watch them every second. It has been stated publicly in the past regarding the crime on rail trails and it is real; in 2006 I reviewed police logs produced by the Easthampton Police Department regarding the crimes actually reported on the rail trail, which included spray paint "tagging" by the Latin Kings, which is a notorious gang, and three young girls being subjected to an adult male who was just taking stroll appreciating nature when he decided to expose himself to them. Regretfully, even the Easthampton Police Chief has downplayed the crime aspect of the rail trail, suggesting there is no problem. We're not sure how the Chief defines the word problem, but I certainly don't want to create a path which brings these activities and dangers to Southampton. People have used such ridiculous analogies as "since there are car accidents and people die, we should not build highways, either." Although the absurdity of such a comment is self-evident, the

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difference is obvious – cars and highways are integral to commerce and travel for society in general, while the rail trail will benefit very few, are costly to build, maintain and police and intrude on the privacy of homeowners. Our Town has many issues which need our attention and the devotion of our tax dollars – this project is certainly not one of them.

The so-called feasibility study (\$25,000) and appraisal (\$5,000) are designed to determine the cost of such a project before the Town will be asked to vote to expend the funds necessary to design, build, maintain and police the rail trail. If you are like us, and believe that this project is not in the best interest of Southampton, and the destruction of the abutters' quiet enjoyment of their own property for such a purpose is simply unacceptable, then please join us in voting down these warrant articles. There certainly is no need to expend \$30,000 for a project which is undesirable, and perhaps if we send the message loud and clear that we don't want a rail trail through Southampton, the constant revisiting of this issue will stop. The Greenway people's plan is to lull you into a false sense of security – it won't cost much to build due to grants, there is no crime or safety concerns, volunteers will maintain the rail trail, etc. – and to wear you down. The fact is once the Town owns the property, it has an obligation to maintain it and patrol it, and certainly our limited resources should not be used for this project, or to have a police presence on a bikeway rather than patrolling our neighborhoods. We must remain vigilant, and if you support our cause to stop the rail trail, we urge you to join us and vote down these warrant articles.

Even if you are not an abutter to this project, the negative financial implications for all Southampton residents are real. This project will require continuous maintenance at the expense of the taxpayers, which will only lead to property tax increases or siphoning money from other more needed enterprises. As it stands right now, Southampton lacks adequate funding for our schools which are not meeting state standards for math and science scores; we don't have adequate housing and transportation for our elderly citizens; and the recreational services for our children are woefully underfunded. As our population continues to grow in Southampton, our Highway, Police and Fire Departments are spread too thin – and most do an outstanding job, by the way, with the limited manpower and resources – and should not our limited tax revenue and manpower be dedicated to those essential services? Unfortunately, many of our Hampshire Regional students come home with limited supervision because in most families, both parents have to work to make ends meet. Do we really want an area which will be largely unsupervised for teenagers to congregate and draw the attention of those who could do them harm? The rail trail in Easthampton and Westfield does not, in large part, wind through residential neighborhoods as it would here in Southampton. There is simply no need for this rail trail and therefore certainly no need to expend precious and limited resources to determine the value of the rail way and the cost to construct this frivolous and expensive project.

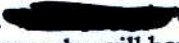
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The Friends of the Greenway only give you one side of the story. If you would like some fascinating – and factual – reading regarding the truth about rail trails from a different perspective, Google “National Association of Reversionary Property Owners (“NARPO”)” which will bring some much needed balance to this all too often one-sided debate.

We very much thank you for taking the time to read this letter and to think through the decision which is before the residents of Southampton.

Very truly yours,


Paul 

We also support Mr.  efforts to protect his property rights and our fellow citizens of Southampton who will bear the tax burden of this project:

Heather 
Vijay 
Michael 
Diane and Dave 