



Town Manager's Office

HAGGETTS POND RAIL TRAIL PROJECT UPDATE

May 28, 2025

As of this week, a portion of the Haggetts Pond Rail Trail extending from Haggetts Pond Road to approximately 0.6 miles down the trail is closed to enable crews to prepare for construction of the first paved, accessible path in the Town of Andover. The parking area at Haggetts Pond Road is also closed during construction.

The project will include the paving of a 0.6-mile section of the rail trail, the installation of a new boardwalk and scenic overlook area, the construction of a new parking area on Haggetts Pond Road, and the addition of amenities such as benches and upgraded signage. This document provides an overview of the project's goals, planning process, environmental safeguards, and anticipated community benefits.

This project will enhance and improve the accessibility of an existing amenity on Town property and will not alter its current uses, which include walking, bicycling, horseback riding, fishing, and picnicking. These uses of the rail trail have been available to most Town residents for more than a century.

The Haggetts Pond Rail Trail has long been valued by residents for its scenic beauty and recreational value. Once completed, this project will establish the first Town-sponsored, fully accessible and ADA-compliant trail in Andover, significantly expanding opportunities for individuals of all ages and abilities to enjoy the trail. By removing physical barriers and improving trail infrastructure, the project will ensure that more residents, including families with young children, seniors, and individuals with disabilities, can safely and comfortably access this treasured space.

The construction of an accessible trail at Haggetts Pond has been a longstanding priority for the Town of Andover and the Commission on Disability. The project has been documented in multiple town planning efforts over the years:

- The project was listed as a priority in the Town's 2012 Master Plan.
- In 2016, the Town completed a review for the inclusive design of the rail trail, a comprehensive process that involved the participation of Town departments and residents with physical, sensory and cognitive limitations.
- The 2018 Open Space and Recreation Plan re-affirmed the Town's commitment to providing an accessible trail at Haggetts Pond.

Under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Town is required to ensure that individuals with disabilities have equal opportunity to benefit from all of its programs and services – including recreational trails.

Before selecting the Haggetts Pond Rail Trail, the Town engaged in a comprehensive process to identify a site that could accommodate an accessible trail. This process included participation from residents with physical, sensory, and cognitive functional limitations. The limited grade of the trail and its relatively straight trajectory were significant factors in the site's selection over other trails considered through this process.

In June of 2023, the Town received a \$500,000 MassTrails Grant to support construction of the trail. While many in the community were introduced to the project at this point, planning for the construction of an accessible trail had been in the works for over a decade by the time that the grant was received.

The Town then began a public engagement process to ensure that members of the community, including abutters and trail users, were aware of the Town's planned improvements of the trail and to provide an opportunity for input.

Based on input gathered through a series of well-attended meetings held throughout 2023, the Town made several significant changes to the scope of the project. These changes included reducing the width of the trail, which remains within the existing railbed, adjusting the new parking area on Haggetts Pond Road, planting additional trees, and relocating the accessible boardwalk and overlook

Additionally, in response to concerns related to the project's impact on endangered turtle species, the Town hired a wetland biologist from BSC Group to develop a Turtle Protection Plan in coordination with the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife to minimize potential impacts on the Blanding's Turtle. Under this plan:

- Construction activities scheduled during the turtle active season (April –November) will be conducted by BSC staff under the supervision of professional wetlands scientist/biologist Matt Byrne, who wrote the plan.
- Daily visual sweeps of the work zone by Conservation Staff and BSC.
- Training for construction crews on turtle identification and handling procedures
- Habitat enhancements—including improvement of vegetative cover around vernal pools

The Town filed a notice of intent with the Conservation Commission in November of 2023. We then engaged in an exhaustive process to earn the Conservation Commission's approval of the project. This process entailed:

- Engaging Horsely Witten Group to conduct a stormwater engineering review
- Engaging LEC Environmental Consultants to conduct a third-party wetlands peer review of the project, conducted by President Ann Martin
- Earning approval of the project from the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP) of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

The Andover Conservation Commissions issued an Order of Conditions approving the project under the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act and the Andover Wetlands Protection By-law on October 15, 2024.

The Order of Conditions was appealed to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) by opponents of the project on October 28, 2024. In reviewing the appeal, DEP conducted a site inspection on January 2, 2025 involving multiple stakeholders

Following their review of the project, DEP issued a Superseding Order of Condition on April 17, 2025, approving the project with minor adjustments and stating that project meets stormwater management and wetland protection standards and approved the project with specific conditions intended to protect environmental interests.

Once this determination was issued, the Town went out to bid for construction services, and selected J Bates & Son to implement the trail improvements.

Finally, while some residents have expressed concern about the rail trail improvement project's impact on Haggetts Pond as the Town's water supply, it is essential to note that neither the Andover Water Department, nor MassDEP expressed concern about the Project's impact on Town water. The Town's water supply is significantly supplemented by water pumped into Haggetts Pond from the Merrimack River, and the Pond itself directly abuts Route 133. Accordingly, the Town has long filtered and treated its water at the Water Treatment Plant on the Pond. If anything, the Project is expected to reduced pollution of the Pond by improving stormwater management and access to waste disposal for rail trail users walking dogs, fishing, and picnicking.

In summary, the Haggetts Pond Rail Trail project represents a thoughtful and inclusive effort to enhance an important recreational resource while preserving the area's natural character.

Shaped by more than a decade of planning and refined through extensive community engagement, the project embodies Andover's commitment to equitable access to public spaces. Environmental considerations have been central throughout the process, with detailed reviews, expert oversight, and protective measures, such as the Turtle Protection Plan, ensuring that the project proceeds responsibly.

As construction begins, the Town remains confident that this trail will serve as a model for inclusive, sustainable recreation in Andover.