

## **New group to act as resource during rail trail discussion**

By Stacey Hart / Staff Writer

Thursday, July 7, 2005

Members of a new organization in town hope to be an information resource to other residents as they fight the possible creation of a rail trail on the former Penn Central right-of-way.

The Sudbury Citizens for Responsible Land Stewardship, formed about a month ago, will promote thoughtful land use planning and land preservation. Between 15 and 20 residents have already joined this new group.

“Basically, what we’re hoping to demonstrate is that we’re going to try to be a strong voice to town government,” said Jim Nigrelli, president of the organization. “We’re trying to get out there and collect viewpoints from the community to figure out what they want and funnel that into town government for the best interest of Sudbury.”

The first goal of this new group is the possible conversion of the rail bed into a trail, which has been the topic of some controversy in recent months. Nigrelli said many residents were surprised to hear the town wanted to build a paved rail trail through the middle of Sudbury.

The town has not yet decided if it will convert the rail bed into a trail, but is asking the Rail Trail Conversion Advisory Committee, established by the selectmen, to evaluate the options and advise the town. At the 2005 annual Town Meeting, voters approved spending \$25,000 for a feasibility study.

The land stewardship organization is concerned about the involvement of the Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail with the new town committee, Nigrelli said.

“We’re a bit concerned this bike lobbyist group may be putting a paved road behind our houses and through the middle of Sudbury. We just wanted to make sure (the town) was doing things that were what the community wanted, not necessarily what the Friends of the Bruce Freeman Trail group wanted,” he said.

The new group will determine whether a trail is the best use of the land and if the town would be happy with it, said Margaret Harty, a member of the land stewardship organization.

“It presents another perspective. I think the bike trail is something we need to examine very carefully for the town as a whole,” she said.

There are three key areas the Sudbury Citizens for Responsible Land Stewardship want to begin gathering more information about.

Nigrelli said it seems the rail bed is surrounded by a lot of wetlands and potentially endangered species. Members of this group are hearing conflicting ways to deal with this though, from capping the rail bed with pavement to digging into parts of it that are too wide.

The second concern is the costs associated with a rail trail.

“Right now, the town has to pay for about 10 percent of the trail. Then there’s going to be all the maintenance-related issues that are going to be completely paid for by the town,” Nigrelli said.

The last issue the organization wants to deal with at this point is traffic concerns, taking into consideration the intersections of the rail bed with major roads like Rte. 20, Rte. 117 and Rte. 27. Nigrelli said there is already congestion in those areas and the organization feels there will be limited solutions to handling the traffic problems.

Allan Wallack, a member of the land stewardship organization said the group is important because it will focus on the issues with a strong unified voice.

“It won’t be individuals, it will be a group of people that have a shared common set of goals,” he said. “I think the town is basically responsive to organizations that represent larger groups of people rather than individuals.”

As an abutter to the rail bed, Harty said she joined the organization because she is concerned about what will happen to the area.

“If I’m not concerned about it, in the sense of what happens on the edge of my property, then I’m not sure other people will be concerned,” she said.

To educate the public on the issues they believe are important to a rail trail project, the land stewardship organization set up a Web site, [www.sudburylandstewardship.org](http://www.sudburylandstewardship.org). Information will be distributed through the Web site and it will be continually updated.

Additionally, the group plans to send letters to residents who are near the rail bed. The first letter was being mailed last week, introducing the organization to residents.

In the letter, they outlined problems with the process of converting the rail bed, their goals and how they plan to protect Sudbury’s natural resources. Residents were encouraged to join the new organization or just get the facts about the rail trail.

In addition to the rail trail, the Sudbury Citizens for Responsible Land Stewardship also plan to look at other projects dealing with the town’s natural resources. The goal will be to present alternative uses for existing resources in Sudbury.

Nigrelli said one of his arguments with funding a rail trail feasibility study is that residents were not given alternatives.

“The town should have been provided multiple choices, determining what they think is best and appropriate for the town, and the community and their needs,” he said. “That was something that was never addressed.”