

## **Wallack: Town wouldn't allow communication**

By Stacey Hart / Daily News Staff

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SUDBURY -- A member of the newly formed Rail Trail Conversion Advisory Committee recently resigned and criticized the town for limiting his communication with other residents and not holding meetings to discuss the issues.

Allan Wallack was one of nine residents appointed by selectmen to the committee, which is charged with examining the conversion of an existing unused rail line in Sudbury to a recreational path and alternative transportation corridor.

"They wouldn't let me communicate with anybody. There were a lot of reasons (for resigning), but that threw me over the line," he said.

Wallack wanted to talk with neighbors and get their concerns on the table, but said he was told not to do that until the committee agreed. He questioned how the committee would be able to understand all the concerns if they could not talk to anyone.

The unused rail line that is the topic of discussion is the Bruce Freeman Memorial Bike Trail, formerly the Penn Central right of way. It is located just north of a Framingham-Sudbury rail trail that is currently the subject of a feasibility study by both towns.

Selectmen Chairman John Drobinski said he does not understand Wallack's criticisms.

"I thought he'd be a valuable member of the committee because he was an abutter to the proposed trail," he said. "It's a shame that he decided to resign and the committee work hasn't even started. I'm scratching my head."

In his resignation letter, Wallack claimed the committee is focused on getting a bike trail approved and will not be open to alternatives.

"I believe the people who are for the bike trail will try to railroad the approval process and suppress, delay or constrict any discussion that could inhibit the process," he wrote.

Wallack claims a lot of people on the committee, which also includes representatives from town boards, have an agenda and fixed opinions on what they want to do. No longer a member of the committee, Wallack said he can now get in touch with neighbors and look for alternatives.

Drobinski said the selectmen have not made up their minds or come to a decision on the rail trail. He is very interested to see what the committee recommends to the board.

"I'm open-minded. My only comment is I want the rail trail, if it is built, to be as useful and environmentally sensitive as possible," Drobinski said.

Wallack also has concerns about the lack of meetings held by the rail trail committee since it was created. An initial organizational meeting was held in November, but nothing since.

If he was not able to talk to residents outside the meetings, Wallack said he was all for holding meetings and having discussions. When that didn't happen, he got frustrated.

A meeting was scheduled earlier this month, but was canceled because of a snow storm.

After Town Meeting in April, committee meetings will probably start to pick up, Drobinski said.

"I'm not sure we really needed to have meetings yet until we get something going," he said.

To help the rail trail committee, the Community Preservation Committee has recommended Town Meeting approve \$25,000 for an engineering assessment study of the trail.

The results of that study will provide the rail trail committee with options to consider and discuss, Drobinski said.

Wallack said he was surprised that although the committee was not meeting, the town was looking to spend \$25,000 on a study.

"Here we are funding \$25,000 for a study. You don't even know if it's the right amount of money or if we're focusing in the right direction," Wallack said.

He even sent a letter to the CPC asking them to reconsider the funding request, saying there were many issues to be discussed and resolved first.

Mark Kablack, chairman of the CPC, said Wallack's issues were discussed at a meeting Wednesday night, but his questions would be best answered by the rail trail committee.

"We thought that this (study) would be the first step. This would provide the basic information that the rail trail committee would need to then begin the process of undertaking the prospect of a conversion and all the issues that the study might reveal," Kablack said.

The study does not commit the town to converting the trail, but it does allow the rail trail committee to start focusing on the issues, he said.

Wallack said he will continue to force the issues to be addressed, even though he's no longer a member of the rail trail committee. He plans to attend meetings and provide members with input. At this point, nothing could be done to convince Wallack to return to the committee.

"I'd be better off just being a listener and talking to people. I don't like the idea I can't talk to people, that I can't go on my own to talk to abutters," he said.

As for the spot left vacant by Wallack, Drobinski said there are no immediate plans to fill the position. When the committee was created late last year, selectmen decided to appoint seven residents, but with so many qualified candidates they upped that number to nine. Unless the committee says they really want one more person, selectmen will not appoint anyone to replace Wallack, he said.

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