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TOP STORY

MWV Rec Path supporters celebrate 1-year anniversary

Daymond Steer
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CONWAY — Dozens of friends of the North Conway Rec Path gathered under a tent at Tuckerman Brewing Co. on Hobbs Street in Conway Village on Thursday night to celebrate the first anniversary of the opening of the paved recreation path with some beer and a cake.

Earlier in the day, MWV Trails Association President Chris Meier took Executive Councilor Joe Kenney (R-Wakefield) on a bike tour of the path.

Both had spoken at the ribbon-cutting a year ago at the successful building of the path, the first phase of which runs along North-South Road and through the woods from Walmart up to Cranmore and which took decades to plan and fund.

The path's first phase is just under three miles long.

"This is a great day," said Meier. "It's about a year since we opened the path, and it's been used more than we could ever imagine when we were planning how to get this path to happen."

Meier said since the path opened, he's seen people biking, roller blading, roller skiing, pushing strollers, in wheelchairs and even someone with a miniature-horse-drawn carriage on the path.

Meier said the path was busy even in the middle of the day Thursday when he rode there with Kenney.

Kenney said this was the first time he had traveled the rec path from end to end, and he was pleased with how many people were using it.

"It was exhilarating, because, you know, now I understand why it's so popular, because there's so many uses for it," said Kenney, adding that North Conway residents can even use the path to bike or walk to their jobs. "So that impressed me — it's actually for purposeful transportation, not only recreation, but it's for the kind of commuter worker."

Kenney said Meier told him that people on the path tend to move faster in the morning because they are either trying to get their exercise before work or they are commuting.

Kenney helped secure \$1.2 million in federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality for the path

In that particular round of CMAQ funding, each of the Executive Councilorsot to pick a project to fund. The funds were awarded in 2017.

Larry Garland, vice president of the MWV Trails Association, and chair of the MWV Rec Path Committee, talked about how the rec ath was conceptualized just about a decade ago.

Garland said they were having difficulty getting traction with the state.

"I saw Joe (Kenney) in the parking lot up at Memorial Hospital, and I said, 'Joe, we need some help here with the state agencies to get to get the door open on this project,' and he came through for us," said Garland.

Rec Path Committee member Bill Aughton said he's been involved with the project for about 15 years. Aughton lives near the north end of the path and has ridden it perhaps 200 times. He's seen many people use it.

"Seeing families, mom and dads with kids with tricycles going around in circles and things like that, I was amazed," he said.

"One day I saw this young woman with obviously a very new baby strapped to her chest and two more toddlers in the carriage in front that she was pushing along and laughing and joking ... You know, all of the things that we ever envisaged are there."

Meier also gave an update on the next phase of the path, which is slated to run from Cranmore north to Intervale Cross Road, a distance of 2.6 miles. He said the design is 60 percent complete and permits are being sought for the construction. Meier said the phase after that would connect to Fryeburg, Maine.

MWV Trails Association board member Sally McMurdo sold Trails Association T-shirts, hats, pendants and stickers. The sale proceeds will go toward operating expenses.

"We have to make some money on the side to to kind of support the rec path and keep it going, and get things we need for it as well," said McMurdo adding items like bike racks and benches could be added in the future.

Meier thanked selectmen for their support of the project.

Selectman John Colbath added, "From the federal government down to local government, this has been a very collaborative effort to have this path built in, say, wonderful addition to our Mount Washington Valley and to the community.

"So everybody who's been involved and participate, I thank you."

There is talk of putting the second phase of the rec path to the town meeting vote next year because it involves paving in Whitaker Woods, and Colbath "challenged" the assembled group to come up with a petitioned article for the second phase. He said Meier, who is an attorney, could help with the wording

"It would be far more effective if it was a people's initiative," said Colbath.

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Reporter