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Ammonoosuc Rail Trail extension from Littleton to Wing Rd., Bethlehem

LITTLETON, N.H. -- The proposed expansion of the Ammonoosuc Recreational Rail Trail could become a reality next year as old railroad ties and steel are removed to make way for a longer recreational trail that could also be used as a bike path.

"Our hope is that by July of next year we will start lifting steel," Chris Gamache, chief supervisor of the New Hampshire Trails Bureau said during the "rails to trails" project update at Monday's selectmen's meeting.

The stretch of railway being looked at for removal includes about five miles through Littleton.

The current trail terminus is at Wing Road in Bethlehem.

While the New Hampshire Department of Transportation officially considers the stretch an active railroad bed, the reality is that it has not been active, although it is still under lease.

Central New Hampshire Railroad, however, the entity that currently has the length under lease, has agreed to give up the lease to Wing Road, said Gamache.

For Littleton, there is an estimated \$13,000 permit cost that covers the federal rail filings and abandonment process, he said. Permits are being drafted now, he said.

In all, the town is expected to have \$55,000 to work with. That comes from a \$25,000 bicycle and pedestrian grant the town applied for as well as \$30,000 the New Hampshire Department of Transportation has programmed for the project.

The rails-to-trails project will include lifting all the rails along the five-mile stretch as well as grading and treating the surface and putting on a gravel finish.

There are about 2,250 ties per mile, making for a total of roughly 10,000 ties to be removed in Littleton, he said.

Some ties will be reused for other projects, he said, and area residents are invited to take the remaining ones, as they did through a similar trails project from Stewartstown to Colebrook,

DOT would keep the steel.

In Littleton, Gamache said, "This stretch of trail is being looked at as a regional bike trail from the Cooley-Jericho Community Forest in Easton to Gorham."

Local business owners and Littleton Parks and Recreation representatives have applauded the proposal, saying it will be a boost to small businesses and provide residents with more recreational opportunities.

Currently, the Ammonoosuc Recreational Rail Trail is 19 miles long and begins at Central Street in Woodsville and ends at Industrial Park Road in Littleton