

THE BARRE MONTPELIER TIMES ARGUS

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2014

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Bridge project to aid bike network

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STAFF WRITER

MONTPELIER — A plan to create a more than 2-mile bike and pedestrian trail parallel to Route 2 in East Montpelier along the Winooski River, including a 200-foot-long bridge, is coming closer to reality, but organizers still need to raise \$200,000 to seal the deal.

The long-envisioned path would connect with the Montpelier bike path at Gallison Hill Road and continue to East Montpelier and points

farther east, according to the vision of the Cross Vermont Trail Association.

The total cost of the East Montpelier project is estimated to be \$1.6 million, and organizers have been told they are eligible for over \$1.2 million in federal grant support on the condition they meet a local match of 20 percent, or about \$325,000. With more than \$100,000 already pledged or in hand from local fundraising, an additional \$206,000 remains to be raised to formally claim the grant dollars.

A kickoff for the public phase of the Build the Bridge campaign by association will be held at the Vermont College of Fine Arts in Montpelier on Nov. 22 at 6:30 p.m.

In an announcement of the fundraising campaign, the association said, "The project will provide a critical connection between the bike path network being developed in Montpelier, Barre and Berlin and other trail projects

See Network, Page A3

Network

Continued from Page A1

underway to the east in East Montpelier and Plainfield."

The new trail will be a safe alternative to the shoulder of Route 2 for walkers and cyclists and provide convenient access to conserved natural areas, according to the group. Eventually, the association hopes to complete a statewide network of four-season off-road trails following the

Winooski and Wells River valleys.

Montpelier Mayor John Hollar on Monday said the East Montpelier link is important to his own city's hopes. "The bridge is critical to our efforts to make Montpelier a biking destination. With the bridge in place, and after we complete construction of our bike path, individuals will be able to bike through Montpelier and across eastern Vermont to Groton State Forest."

Hollar said the city plans

to extend its own bike path from Granite Street near the Hunger Mountain Coop to the Central Vermont Civic Center on Gallison Hill Road, where the Cross Vermont Trail Association link to East Montpelier will begin.

The bridge part of the East Montpelier project — a 200-foot span for cyclists and pedestrians — will be constructed at the site of a former railroad bridge, where abutments for that old structure still remain.

The bridge is planned

about in the middle of the 2-mile trail, just upstream from the Winooski Hydroelectric Company dam, a section described by the trail group as a "bottleneck that we can't go around, but have to build through."

"We have agreements with landowners on either side of the river that will allow us to move the trail off 2.75 miles of U.S. Route 2. Without a bridge, these agreements cannot be acted on," the group said.

Greg Western, executive director of the trail

association, said the bridge will be "a keystone piece in our long-term effort to create a conserved greenway across the width of the state."

He hopes to begin construction of the bridge and associated trail by 2016 at the latest.

The event Nov. 22 at the college will be in the chapel on the second floor of College Hall. Admission will be \$20 for adults, \$10 for those 16 and under, and \$45 for a family of four. The evening will feature a showing of the

film "The Dream Factory," which shows "some of the world's best riders and skiers taking on Alaska's most awe-inspiring and vertical snow and alpine terrain," according to an announcement about the event. There will be a cash bar and raffle as well.

For more information about the fundraising campaign and the trail building project, contact the Cross Vermont Trail Association at 498-0079.

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Cross Vermont Trail: The build-a-bridge campaign

Think about it. What could be better than a trail extending from Lake Champlain to the Connecticut River, along the Winooski and through the Wells River Valley — a trail that invites safe, scenic, accessible, four-season recreational travel on foot, bicycle, snowshoes or skis?

This would be a trail removed from the dangers, noise and irritations of the road, a trail for all ages and abilities. Sounds good, doesn't it?

"It's a lofty project," Bill Merrylees said, "but very do-able."

Merrylees, a board member of the Cross Vermont Trail Association, spoke at a recent fundraiser.

"These are 90 miles of community and local trail systems knit together into a network," Merrylees said. "There are a lot of reasons to build this trail. It is family-friendly and safe for kids where it is separate from roads and cars. It provides a route for nonpolluting nonconsumptive transportation, owned by the public and preserved forever. Most of all, it

is a way to get out into nature and to experience the joy of traveling through it."

His enthusiasm for construction of a bridge across the Winooski in East Montpelier was supported by a packed house, members of the Central Vermont community who had come together for the showing of a new ski movie shot primarily in Alaska, some good food, and camaraderie.

Montpelier's mayor, John Hollar, an avid cyclist, pointed to thriving cities across the nation that protect and provide for pedestrians and cyclists.

"Bike friendliness says a lot about a community, the community's commitment to fitness, health and the environment," he said.

With successful paths in Burlington and Stowe, new and planned bike lanes on Montpelier streets, and the anticipated connection with the CVT, Hollar said he is committed to helping Montpelier become an "internationally recognized bike and pedestrian community."



Linda
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Active Vermont



PHOTO BY BILL MERRYLEES

From left: Ben Merrylees, Renee Kivett-Kylar, Lucy Patti and Eliza Merrylees ski the Cross Vermont Trail in East Montpelier.

These are local hopes and dreams. Lt. Gov. Phil Scott made the link from local to national.

"Cycling is one of my passions," Scott said. As he described his first road bike — the one he bought from Onion River Sports, the one on which he has logged nearly 40,000 miles, the one that he painted the same green as his race car, and the one he is still riding — the audience cheered.

Scott, however, went deep. It's easy to link cycling to Vermont's economy. Tourism is the state's No. 1 industry. Trails are huge attractions. "We must

up the ante to remain competitive with other states," he said.

Yes, the economy is a big concern for Vermonters. There is another as well.

"We talk about health care," Scott said. "What we don't talk about enough is prevention. We need to develop more trails and get healthy, and drive that message home."

What could be better than the trail described above? Reaching the funding goal would be the best. Much progress as been made, and the end is in sight (see www.crossvermont.org).

"It's like 'Field of Dreams,'" Scott said. "Build it and they will come."

The movie "The Dream Factory," aptly named for this event, is a big mountain film that parallels big dreams of both individuals and communities.

Extraordinary footage of equally extraordinary skiers and boarders is mind-boggling.

Perhaps, however, it is the narration by participating athletes that speaks most appropriately to the goals and dreams of the CVT.

Alaska demonstrates a "history of hope and potential." It is a place you can "make it big." It is a place "where dreams become reality." See what I mean?

The movie closes with the musings of one of the narrators: "It's not a question of budget, but motivation. If you want it, you've just got to go do it."

Yes and no. Go do it certainly. But there's usually a price tag. That's where CVT is right now — paying the price to make a dream come true.

Linda Freeman is an athlete and trainer based in central Vermont. Reach her through her web site, www.lindafreemanfitness.com.