

BRISTOL COUNTY

# Taunton-Fall River bike path gets backing

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TAUNTON — A board member of the Taunton River Watershed Alliance appeared before the Bristol County Commissioners on Tuesday to brief the board on a proposed bicycle path between Taunton and Fall River along the Taunton River.

“The alliance is trying to be a strong advocate for it,” TRWA Board Member Alfred Lima said.

The alliance and the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District are the proposal’s main proponents.

Lima said the intent of his presentation was to provide the county government with information on the project. SRPEDD first proposed the bike path in 1999, but shelved it seven years later due to a lack of interest and funding. There has recently been renewed interest, however, and Lima said he is now hopeful that there could be significant work under way and funding in place within the next three to five years. The project, he added, is still in its formative stages and is ever evolving.

He said he also hopes that at some point in the future, land around Bristol County Agricultural High School, which is overseen by the County Commissioners, could be incorporated into a greenway along the proposed bike path.

The County Commissioners took no action on the issue. Commissioner Maria Lopes said she wants to learn more details about the project before supporting it.

The proposed bike path, proponents have said, will likely be built piecemeal as



TAUNTON GAZETTE PHOTO | GERRY TUOTI

Taunton River Watershed Alliance Board Member Alfred Lima points out the route of a proposed bike path along the Taunton River.

bits of funding become available. The 22-mile route would begin in Taunton’s Weir neighborhood, run through Dighton and end at Veterans Memorial Bridge, which connects Somerset and Fall River. It would connect with other bike paths along the way.

The alliance and SRPEDD are currently still working on acquiring rights of way. According to some estimates, the project could cost up to \$700,000 per mile.

Off-road portions of the bike path would largely follow old rail lines — two large sections of which are owned by the Taunton Municipal Lighting Plant

and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation. Lima said they have received a commitment from the Taunton Municipal Lighting Plant and have been in contact with the DCR.

The portion owned by the DCR travels through Sweets Knoll State Park in Dighton.

Lima said he is encouraged that the project recently received a \$10,000 grant from the National Parks Service to pay for some preliminary work.

“It’s a great concept,” he said. “There’s a lot of excitement over it, and we hope to make it happen over time.”