

White Paper Athol Orange Millers River Greenway Trail

Background

This white paper is intended to provide background and detail on the work that has been completed previously related to the development of a bikeway/greenway connecting downtowns Athol and Orange. It is also intended that this white paper will provide information to support moving to the next steps of the planning and design process. The white paper includes a narrative detailing the previous planning related to the trail; information on other recent planning documents that recommend or support the trail development; information about potential funding sources that could be used to complete the design and/or construction of the trail; and next steps including a proposed timeframe.

Past Bikeway/Greenway Planning

The towns of Athol and Orange identified the development of a bikeway/greenway along the Millers River as a priority and a long-term planning project in the 1990s. Since then, several evaluations and feasibility studies have taken place to identify the best route.

In 1997, the Orange Revitalization Partnership received funding through the Massachusetts Transportation Enhancements program to design and construct an off-road bikepath. At that time, the concept was for a bikepath along the Millers River from where the Orange Riverfront Park is now located to Canal Street in Athol. In 2000, the engineering firm Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. (VHB) completed a feasibility study of potential bicycle routes along the river. However, after an initial assessment of the right-of-way and environmental issues, it was determined that this off-road concept was not feasible, and an on-road bicycle facility became the preferred alternative. The off-road concept had involved significant acquisitions and/or easements to secure the necessary right-of-way for the path.

Consequently, a feasibility study that reviewed the option to construct an on-road bicycle facility was completed. The report included descriptions of the existing conditions and traffic volumes on the roads that were being considered as a part of the bicycle route, the potential bicycle route alternatives for the proposed on-road bicycle facility connecting Orange and Athol, an analysis of the alternatives, and a recommended route. The recommended route was approximately 5.2 miles beginning at what is now the Orange Riverfront Park on the southern side of the Millers River in Orange. The route continues east on East River Street to the intersection of East River Street and Daniel Shays Highway (Route 202). The route then turns north and follows Daniel Shays Highway to Route 2A. At the intersection of Daniel Shays Highway and Route 2A, the route heads east along Route 2A into downtown Athol and ends at Canal Street. These plans did not move toward implementation because of safety concerns (such as high speeds and traffic volumes) and cost (blasting was required to put the bike route on Route 2A).

During 2004 and 2005, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC), the Town of Athol, and the Town of Orange reassessed the plans and completed additional conceptual design work. A revised route was developed which included the on-road route in Orange that was identified in the 2000 study,

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but that also incorporated an off-road bicycle path section in Athol. The proposed route is approximately 4 miles beginning at the Riverfront Park in Orange. The route continues east on East River Street to its intersection with Daniel Shays Highway (Route 202). The route turns north and follows Daniel Shays Highway to an abandoned road located just south of the McDonalds restaurant. The proposed route travels along an abandoned road (Procter Avenue) and through land that is publicly owned. The route reconnects with residential neighborhood streets (Jones Street, South Street, and onto Canal Street) and then terminates in downtown Athol at the Alan E. Rich Environmental Park. The off-road section utilizes land that is almost entirely publicly owned. There is one location where a crossing of the Millers River would be necessary. This proposal did not move forward because of a lack of funding for design and commitment by a project proponent.

In 2014, a series of meetings were held to discuss and identify a viable bike path route between the Orange Riverfront Park and Athol. Two million dollars was included in the 2014 Massachusetts Transportation Bond Bill for “the purchase, planning, design and construction of a scenic pedestrian river walk and bicycle pathway from South Main Street in the town of Athol to West River Street in the town of Orange”. During this round of discussions, State Representative Denise Andrews and Orange Community Development Director Kevin Kennedy proposed moving the project back to an off-road path along the Millers River, and the new round of route planning focused on identifying an off-road route. Kevin Kennedy conducted some planning and mapping and identified a conceptual route that included a portion of the route in Orange being switched to an off-road trail. The route in Athol remained the same as the one that was identified in Athol during the planning in 2004-2005. The proposed route in Orange traveled on East River Street from the Riverfront Park to the King James Court/Pine Crest residential developments. The off-road portion of the trail route traveled along the rear of the King James Court/Pine Crest properties, onto the rear of a 2009 subdivision development and a vacant parcel encumbered by wetlands, and back onto East River Street. It was left that Kevin Kennedy would contact property owners to determine interest in the project. There was no further follow up to the FRCOG about whether this outreach was conducted.

Most recently, a meeting was held on December 23, 2019, with representatives from the towns of Orange and Athol, FRCOG, MRPC, and local interest groups. A review of the previous planning work was presented. The discussion focused on how to proceed with the Athol-Orange Greenway project. It was agreed that the project intended to connect the Orange Riverfront Park and the Alan E. Rich Environmental Park in Athol. The group also agreed that a shared roadway route in Orange will be the focus in the short term and that the off-road section of the trail identified in 2014 would be a long-range project. The follow-up to the December 2019 meeting was to develop a White Paper that outlines the project and identifies the next steps to move the proposed bikeway forward that connects Downtown Athol and Downtown Orange and connect it to the Millers River Blue Trail.

Previously Completed Plans

As previously noted, the planning and development of a trail connection between downtown Athol and Orange have been discussed since the 1990s. It has been highlighted in the goals and recommendations of many planning reports and studies since that time. The listing below highlights the recently complete relevant reports and briefly described the context of the inclusion of the trail project. This is intended to further information about recent discussion and public input supporting the advancement of the trail development.

Athol Plans

Planning Assistance Grant Application (submitted to EOEEA May 2020 and awarded November 2020)

The Planning Assistance Grant Application included a project to update zoning in the downtown area, which will fall under the MA Sustainable Development Principles, including facilitating walking, biking, and transit use. The downtown zoning changes will promote and provide planning for a variety of multimodal transportation options including safer routes, accessible sidewalks, trails, bike paths and lanes, and improved public transportation access.

Athol Open Space and Recreation Plan (January 20, 2020)

As part of the development of the *Athol Open Space and Recreation Plan*, a survey of residents was completed. The survey asked what unmet recreational needs there are in Athol. By a wide margin, the respondents very strongly believed that more recreation opportunities are needed for people with mobility challenges. Respondents also identified a need for bike paths, dog-walking opportunities, hiking trails, and backpacking campsites, better beaches, more camping, fishing, animal watching, and community gardens.

Residents were also asked which activities or places they enjoy, and 45% chose “Biking, roads and bike paths.” Also, several comments from residents in the survey specifically mentioned the desire for a bike path/trail between Orange and Athol.

A general goal to improve and expand parks and open space and to create new recreational opportunities was identified in the *Athol Open Space and Recreation Plan*. Also, an objective was included to link scattered conservation and recreation areas through the establishment of a continuous greenway network for recreation and wildlife. Portions of this network should be bike paths and usable for those with limited mobility. The historic rail bed of the “Rabbit Run” could be the nucleus or backbone of a moderate-length path linking conservation areas in South Athol the center of town.

Statement in the OSRP and Master Plan:

In addition to Athol’s existing conservation and recreation areas, a few areas are of particular interest to local citizens. These are:

- Millers River Greenway - A permanent greenway is proposed along the southern bank of Millers River, extending from Athol Center to Orange Center. The benefits of this greenway are that the greenway would help protect water quality and wildlife habitat, and

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provide an important opportunity for linear pursuits along the river, such as hiking, biking, and walking.

Due Diligence and Master Planning for Key Development Parcels in Downtown Athol Report (completed by the BSC Group and dated 2019)

The report identified the priority actions to:

The future actions proposed include streetscape improvements along Exchange Street, including but not limited to, a reduction in the width of vehicle travel lanes, additional on-street parking, crosswalks, wider sidewalks, and street trees; and an extended river walk trail from the parking lot adjacent to the library to Exchange Street, as a potential open space opportunity in the heart of the downtown.

Athol Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Community Resilience Building: Integrated MVP HMP Report; Summary of Findings and Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

The Millers River was considered as part of the *Athol Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Community Resilience Building* (MVP) planning process. It was noted as an important social, economic, and environmental resource. The Millers River represents an important cultural feature within the community. The relationship of the Millers River to Athol's historical heritage was apparent during community resilience-building efforts. During the MVP planning process, stakeholders frequently mentioned the importance of improving access to the river and supporting economic development that improves infrastructural, societal, and environmental conditions along the river. Workshop participants frequently cited the importance of the Millers River to the historic and future prosperity of downtown Athol. Municipal attention and engaged community leadership are committed to building a vibrant downtown Athol that is centered on the Millers River.

The following High Priority Resilience Actions were noted:

The Millers River represents important cultural, ecological, and environmental values within the community. Ensure downtown or open space planning efforts consider access to the Millers River as part of its planning and implementation efforts. Promote the historical or cultural significance of the Millers River through educational or outreach materials. Establish a local greenway along the Millers River. Coordinate with The Town of Orange to promote the establishment of a regional greenway community planning initiative.

The following Medium Priority Resilience Actions were noted:

Expand Pedestrian Shelters and Complete Streets programs. Collaborate with MassDOT for Greenway development. Develop a plan to establish cohesive greenway access or connection to the river in downtown Athol. Ensure access and an infrastructural connection to the Millers River is integrated into planning and implementation efforts.

Complete Streets Prioritization Plan (approved September 2019)

Athol participates in the Massachusetts Complete Streets Funding Program. As part of that program, Athol compiled a *Complete Street Prioritization Plan* and included a project to construct the Millers River Greenway Hike and Bike Trail to connect downtown Athol (Alan E. Rich Environmental Park) and downtown Orange (the Millers River). The Prioritization Plan notes that the project is in the planning stages and that the right of way needs to be determined for the full length of the project. The construction cost for the project is not determined.

Technical Assistance Panel Report (October 10, 2017)

The *Technical Assistance Panel Report* was developed by the Urban Land Institute of Boston and New England. The report included the recommendation:

If the Towns of Athol and Orange could extend their existing level of collaboration to develop a more robust recreational tourist trade – perhaps in collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce’s visitor’s bureau designation – it could serve not only as a driver to revitalize the Downtown of Athol but to benefit the entire region.

Athol Master Plan (November 2002)

The following are selected goals, objectives, and recommendations:

- Work with regional conservation land trusts to permanently protect open space, forestland, and farmland parcels that have been identified as important to preserve from development. Focus open space conservation efforts on parcels along the proposed Millers River Greenway for recreational activities and wildlife conservation.
- Identify and acquire land parcels to improve public access to the Millers River for recreational activities.
- Protect and preserve the character of Athol’s significant historic landscapes.
- Link scattered conservation and recreation areas through the establishment of a continuous greenway network.
- Work with the Department of Environmental Management and the Mt. Grace Land Conservation Trust to develop an active open space conservation program for the Town of Athol that combines passive recreation and land protection with priority given to parcels of land that provide access to the Millers and Tully Rivers.
- Improve the pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.
- Explore the feasibility of providing walking and bicycling trails throughout Athol. (Millers River Greenway).
- Members of the public strongly support designated bikeways for recreational and commuting traffic. Bikeways are special routes and/or facilities established to facilitate the movement of bicycles as an energy-efficient transportation and/or recreation mode of travel. The construction of bikeways will encourage cycle commuting by providing a direct, separate, and safe route between the communities.
- Work with neighboring communities and regional entities to establish a regional trail network that would ultimately link Athol to recreational opportunities in Orange and Petersham. (Greenway Committee, ongoing)

Orange

Complete Streets Prioritization Plan (approved May 2020)

As part of the Massachusetts Complete Streets Funding Program, Orange compiled a *Complete Streets Prioritization Plan*. The Prioritization Plan includes two projects that include the construction of bicycle facilities on East River Street. One project is the construction of a bike lane on East River Street between South Main Street and the Public Works Building that is estimated to cost \$450,000. The second is a project to install a bicycle facility on East River Street between the Public Works Building and Athol Town Line. The funding required to construct that project is \$171,000.

Orange Americans with Disabilities Transition Plan (2020)

Orange recently completed an Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Transition Plan. The plan assessed accessibility needs throughout the town including sidewalks and parks. The development of a trail connection along East River Street connecting the Riverfront Park to downtown Athol would provide an opportunity to address any accessibility needs.

Orange Open Space and Recreation Plan (2016)

The town of Orange completed an Open Space and Recreation Plan in 2016. The plan was developed with input from a public survey, a public forum, the findings from other recently completed town planning efforts including the 2015 Downtown Orange Riverfront Revitalization Study, and information about the town's natural resources. One of the main goals of the Plan is to "improve the quality, quantity, and accessibility of recreational resources in Orange for current and future generations." The plan acknowledges the town's long-term interest in developing a trail between Orange and Athol.

As part of the development of the Open Space and Recreation Plan, a survey was completed. The development of a bicycle route between Orange and downtown Athol was identified as the top recreation priority in the 2015 Orange Open Space and Recreation survey.

Also, the survey found:

- The top recreation priorities identified by survey respondents are to make Orange more bike-friendly (57%), continue the development of riverfront recreation opportunities downtown (55%), add more recreational programs for teenagers (51%), make Orange more pedestrian-friendly (47%), and create small parks, playgrounds, and community gardens on vacant lots in downtown (42%).
- When asked what they like most about living in Orange, 50 % (the second-highest response) identified outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Sidewalks were identified as the most used recreational resource (65%), with Butterfield Park (50%) second and Riverfront Park and boathouse (49%) third. The proposed trail would increase accessibility to Butterfield Park and the Riverfront Park for all trail users.

A seven-year action plan was developed as part of the plan. One of the final action plan goals is to support the redevelopment and revitalization of downtown Orange by investing in infrastructure improvements and cultural, recreational, and open space assets that will benefit residents and businesses while attracting tourists and new businesses to town. Further, an objective of that goal is to support initiatives that enhance recreational access along the Millers River between Orange and Athol Town Centers. The specific action item is to work closely with

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the Town of Athol to secure funding for the design and development of the Millers River Greenway bike route.

Orange Community Development Strategy (Updated and Adopted on December 2, 2015)

The Orange Community Development Strategy was developed with public input and a comprehensive review of other town planning documents. The Community Development Strategy was reviewed and discussed at a public informational meeting that was held on November 4, 2015, in the Orange Town Hall and broadcast on public access television. The strategy was adopted by the Selectboard at the meeting held on December 2, 2015. The planning processes resulted in the ranking of specific action plans to be undertaken by the Town during the next three to five years. A goal to complete the Orange to Athol bikeway was included in the strategy as number six (6) on the project list.

Downtown Orange Riverfront Revitalization Study (Completed October 1, 2015)

This study is a masterplan vision for the core area of Downtown Orange. A series of meetings with public and private stakeholders were held as part of this planning process. The final report recognized the many past planning efforts, what was completed already from those planning efforts, and what was still needed to be completed. The past reports reviewed include the: Ecotourism Marketing Report (2002); Town of Orange Master Plan (2005); Sustainable Design Assessment Team Study (2009); Community Needs Survey (2010); Market Assessment Survey (2013); Mill Vision/Riverfront Reconsidered (2013); Redevelopment Financing Case Study (2013); Visioning Sessions (2013); and various studies by the Community Development Office.

The plan consolidated the goals from those past efforts into a new set of goals. The goals include one that specifically identified the development of a trail along the river and other related goals. The following are the relevant goals:

- Build identity/economy around local resources including Miller's River;
- Create a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly environment;
- Strengthen community with downtown events/facilities;
- Focus on outdoor activities, local cafes and galleries; and
- Incorporate new trails along the river's edge.

The fiscal Year 2014 Recreation Trails Program Grant

Orange received a Recreational Trails Grant (now the MassTrails Program) in the fiscal year 2014 for "Re-Centering Around the River Project". This project was to construct a Downtown Riverfront Trail and provide safe and equitable access to the Millers River Blue Trail using a variety of supportive devices for the physically disabled, including a floating dock/adaptive boat launch, a hoist sling, and a shallow transfer area. The project also included the construction of a 2,200 linear foot urban trail along the Millers River and through the artifacts of Orange's industrial past to provide a canoe/kayak portal into the River and accessible anglers landing. This project supports the broader goals and vision for Orange that is also supported by the Athol-Orange Trail Project.

The fiscal Year 2014 MA Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC) Grant

Orange received a Massachusetts Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC) grant in 2014 to complete improvements to Butterfield Park, including the renovation of the ball field, construction of new sidewalks, and installation of new playground equipment. The Town plans to pursue PARC funds for additional improvements to the park. This park is near the trail on East River Street.

Potential Funding Sources

There are several potential sources of funding to support the design and/or construction of the Athol-Orange Trail Project. While no one source would fund both planning, design, and construction the funding sources detailed below provide opportunities to further develop this project.

MassTrails Grant Program

The [MassTrails Grant Program](#) is administered by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (MA DCR). MassTrails seeks to expand and connect the network of off-road, shared-use pathways, and recreational trails for all users across the state. The program provides matching grants, technical assistance, and resources to assist in the planning, design, construction, and maintenance of trails. The grant applications are due annually on February 1st. Communities, public entities, and non-profit organizations are eligible to apply. Grant amounts are dependent on the project and range from \$5,000 to \$300,000 for high priority projects. The eligible grant activities include project development, design, engineering, permitting, construction, and maintenance of recreational trails, shared-use pathways, and the amenities that support trails. The grants are reimbursable, and the project proponent must provide a minimum 20% match of the total project cost. A review of projects funded under last year's grant round revealed that there were many trail development projects funded through this program at around \$100,000. Tasks that were funded included right of way planning, early design, survey, engineering, and later phases of design and permitting. The program is competitive, but the available funding has increased in recent years.

Massachusetts Complete Streets Funding Program

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) administers the [Complete Streets Funding Program](#). A Complete Street provides safe and accessible options for all travel modes - walking, biking, transit, and vehicles – for people of all ages and abilities. The MA Complete Streets Funding Program provides technical assistance and construction funding to eligible municipalities. To be eligible to participate in the program a municipality must pass a Complete Streets Policy and develop a Prioritization Plan. Both Athol and Orange are participants in the program. Both communities have compiled Prioritization Plans. Communities that participate in the program are eligible to apply for up to \$400,000 in Tier 3 Construction funding projects that are included in their Complete Streets Prioritization Plan. The program does not fund design work. There is not a required local match. The program is administered like the Chapter 90 program. The deadlines for Tier 3 Construction funding applications are May 1st and October 1st annually.

MassDOT Winter Shared Streets and Spaces

The [MassDOT Winter Shared Street and Spaces](#) funding program is a COVID relief program that is being implemented from December 2020 to February 2021. The program provides cities and towns with grants between \$5,000 and \$500,000 to improve plazas, sidewalks, curbs, streets, parking areas, and other public spaces in support of public health, safe mobility, and renewed commerce. The funding is for projects that can be implemented quickly. The applications are being reviewed in 4 rounds the last of which is February 26, 2021, and the projects must be completed by May 31, 2021. Eligible projects include changes to streets, curbs, sidewalks, and/or parking (on- and off-street) to make more space or safer walking bicycling. The applications are scored based on the quality, functionality, safety, and creativity of the proposed project, its ability to address municipal goals and needs, and sensitivity to the COVID-19 public health crisis. The program could potentially include a trial of painted bike lanes that would be kept permanently if it worked out well.

Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) Funding

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is a prioritized, financially constrained, multi-year program for the implementation of transportation improvement projects in a particular region (Athol is in the MRPC region and Orange is in the FRCOG region) that will receive federal funding. Any project intended to receive federal transportation funds must, by federal regulation, be listed in an improvement program that includes broad public participation. The TIP is drafted each year by the [FRCOG](#) and [MRPC](#), and includes detailed project evaluations that take into account need, community support, additional benefits, project readiness, and funding availability. The TIP is a potential source of funding for this type of project.

There are several steps to get TIP funding. A project must be initiated with MassDOT. This involves completing a project initiation form through the online tool called MaPIT. As part of the initiation process, the project is scored, reviewed, and potentially approved by the MassDOT Project Review Committee (PRC). Also as part of the MassDOT project initiation process, the Metropolitan Planning Organization (as in the case of Athol) or the Transportation Planning Organization (as in the case of Orange) is notified of the potential project. These organizations are made up of Federal, State, Regional and Local officials who meet regularly to review the status of projects and determine which projects to list on the TIP. Once a project is approved by the PRC it is eligible for TIP funding and it is assigned a project identification number. However, it is important to note that being *eligible* for TIP funding is *not* a guarantee of TIP funding. Getting a project on the TIP requires coordination with MassDOT, the MPO/TPO, and a strong project proponent (i.e. the Town in which the project is located).

Projects that receive TIP funding receive 100% of the construction costs (80% Federal, 20% state). However, the design and right-of-way costs are the responsibility of the project proponent. Whether a project is listed on the TIP and in which year is determined in large part by the commitment and progress of design by the host community. Often the commitment of design funds is extremely difficult for small towns, but without design, towns will not be successful in receiving TIP construction funds. Also, it's important to note that the TIP is an excellent source of funds for eligible projects, however, it does have a very long timeframe. It is

not uncommon for projects to take 10 years from project initiation to construction. This is due to a long queue of projects, limited funding, and the length of time design typically takes.

MassDevelopment Commonwealth Places Program

[Commonwealth Places](#) provides a creative funding mechanism to advance community place-making projects throughout Massachusetts. The statewide program will help fund place-based, community-driven projects such as art installations, parks, bike trails, markets, and more to revitalize downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts.

Commonwealth Places is a collaborative MassDevelopment and Patronicity initiative that is a crowd-granting challenge program intended to activate new or distressed public places and community spaces. Municipalities and nonprofits in low- and moderate-income communities in Massachusetts are eligible to participate in the program. The amount of match funding available to communities is dependent on income levels. Both Orange and Athol are eligible for a 50-50 match of up to \$50,000. The program mobilizes community members, residents, and general supporters to make individual contributions while promoting their efforts to others. Communities and non-profits can submit projects by applying for a [Patronicity](#) crowdfunding online donation campaign. Projects meeting fundraising goals can receive a matching grant from MassDevelopment of up to \$50,000.

Projects must demonstrate that they will activate a new or underused space that is open and accessible to the public. The project must be defined and focused and be a place-making project with the potential to catalyze economic impact. The project should be located in a downtown or commercial area and enhance the public realm at the pedestrian scale. Bike paths are listed as an eligible category of the program, and there may be some aspect of the greenway project that could be funded through this program.

Massachusetts Downtown Initiative

The [Massachusetts Downtown Initiative \(MDI\)](#) is an annual, competitive technical assistance program of the MA Department of Housing and Community Development. As opposed to an award of grant funds, the MDI awards professional consultant services for a specific task that is focused on downtown revitalization. In the 2019 application round, the value of these services was up to \$15,000. There is no cash match requirement for this program. The only requirement is the time of municipal staff and local officials and/or volunteers to work with the consultant. Typically, projects are completed within a 6-8 month period.

Technical assistance can be provided on a range of topics, such as housing, parking, and small business support. One of the topics is assistance to develop public wayfinding/branding. This assistance can include the design of a logo/image, a plan for sign placement, and cost estimates for implementation. Two municipalities can work together on a project, with a single municipality as the lead applicant. The MDI may be an opportunity for Athol and Orange to work together to develop shared signage for the bikepath. The project application must highlight how this project will support the revitalization of the two downtowns. The next round is scheduled to be announced in January 2021.

Massachusetts Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Grant Program

The [LWCF](#) is administered by Massachusetts on behalf of the National Park Service (NPS), an agency of the Department of the Interior. The LWCF program provides grants to states and local governments and federally recognized Indian tribes for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities. The program is intended to create and maintain a nationwide legacy of high-quality recreation areas and facilities and to stimulate non-federal investments in the protection and maintenance of recreation resources across the United States.

Eligible projects are those for the acquisition of parkland, development of a new park, renovation of an existing park, development of trails in an existing conservation or recreation area, or the acquisition of conservation land. Applications will be accepted from municipalities that have Open Space and Recreation Plans that are approved or currently under review. For projects that will have a significant impact on climate resiliency, the maximum grant award is \$1,000,000. The maximum grant award for all other project is \$750,000. The minimum grant award is \$50,000. Since the LWCF is a reimbursement program, municipal applicants selected to receive grant funding must have a successful Town Meeting vote that appropriates 100% of the total project cost. Reimbursement is at 50%. All projects must provide appropriate public access. Tasks eligible for funding are engineering, design, construction, construction supervision, and land acquisition.

The deadline for the LCWF grant applications is February 1st of each year and grant timelines give two years to finish work associated with grant awards. Points are gained on the application for recreational access to Environmental Justice populations, as well as the availability of water access, trail development, wildlife viewing opportunities, environmental education opportunities, access for the disabled, making this grant a great potential for award.

Next Steps and Milestones

It is important that the towns commit to moving this project forward. There are opportunities to seek funding for different components of this project, but clear endorsement and direction must come from the towns.

- Towns confirm interest in moving the project forward.

Below are the next steps and timeframe considerations for each of the potential funding sources and the possible components of the project that could be funded.

MassTrails Grant

These are actions to move forward with a MassTrails grant application for the next round, which has a **February 1, 2021**, deadline, or to prepare for a future round. The application is an opportunity to seek funding to begin the design and engineering process. The application could seek funding for project design elements such as completing a preliminary design plan, an assessment of the right-of-way necessary, and/or evaluation of the design options for the bridge needed in Athol. A review of projects that were awarded funding last year revealed that many projects included elements of trail design work and that the MassTrails grant awards were generally around \$100,000.

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- A decision would need to be made no later than the first week of January 1, 2021, whether to move forward with this application as the application will take time to assemble to meet the February 1st deadline.

The following are needed for the application:

- Define the scope of work;
- Determine the project budget;
- Decide who would be the fiscal agent. More than one entity can apply jointly, but one fiscal agent must be designated.
- A confirmed source for a 20% match. The match can be a cash match, donated services, and volunteer labor. The cash match can be obtained from other state and federal grants, donations, or other resources, like Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds. There are requirements for documenting and accounting for the match, which will be the responsibility of the fiscal agent.
- Letters of support from the select boards, legislators, relevant supportive organizations, and local business leaders.

Winter Shared Streets and Spaces

- Seek funding to complete temporary installation of the on-road portions of the project that could be implemented before May 31, 2021. The funding round is open and the application form available for download.
- Write an application and submit it before February 26, 2021. Contact FRCOG and MRPC for assistance with the application.

Massachusetts Complete Streets Funding Program

Both Orange and Athol have components of the project already included in their Complete Streets Prioritization Plans.

Recommendations:

- Orange apply for funding in the upcoming MA Complete Street Funding round for one of the two relevant projects:
 - Orange submits an application to the MA Complete Streets Funding program for \$171,000 to install a bicycle facility on East River Street between the Public Works Building and Athol Town Line. The deadline for submission is May 1, 2021. The application materials are posted on the [MA Complete Streets Funding Program](#) website so the application materials can be prepared now.
 - Orange applies to the MA Complete Streets Funding program for a portion of the project (up to \$400,000) to construct a bike lane on East River Street between South Main Street and the Public Works Building. This project is estimated to cost \$450,000. Orange could apply for up to \$400,000 and use other funding to make up the difference or scale the project back to cost less than \$400,000. The deadline for submission is May 1, 2021.
- Athol complete design and determine which parts of the project could be completed with Complete Streets funding for the grant rounds in 2022. Seek funding for the portions of the project that are on-road and connect to the Alan E. Rich Environmental Park.

TIP Funding

- As described the TIP process requires balancing projects with limited resources. It takes time for projects to move through this process. Contact FRCOG and/or MRPC to review the TIP process and strategize how this project can proceed.
- Initiate the MassDOT Project Need process.
- Determine the source of funding to complete the design for the project.

Massachusetts Downtown Initiative

Typically, the MDI program has a relatively short time frame between when the application solicitation is announced and the application submission deadline. The application form is usually not very lengthy. It is anticipated that the next round of applications will be announced in January and likely due in February 2021. If this is the case, the following actions are recommended:

- Athol and Orange Select Boards vote in January 2021 to pursue an MDI application for technical assistance to design shared signage for the bikepath. They must also determine which town will be the lead applicant.
- Apply by the anticipated February 2021 deadline. FRCOG and MRPC staff are available to consult on the completion of the application form.
- If awarded, municipal staff and local officials, and/or volunteers will need to work with the consultants to complete the project within a timely period (typically within about 6-8 months).

Massachusetts Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Grant Program

This program is offered annually in November, with an application deadline of the following February 1st and a grant award of July 1st, and two years to complete all work. Tasks eligible for funding are engineering, design, construction, construction supervision, and land acquisition. Points are gained on the application for recreational access for Environmental Justice populations, as well as the availability of water access, trail development, wildlife viewing opportunities, environmental education opportunities, access for the disabled person, etc., making this grant a great potential for award.

- Recommend further investigation and discussion with the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation to ensure the project is eligible.
- To be eligible to apply for LWCF a municipality must have an up-to-date Open Space and Recreation Plan. Check the status of the Athol and Orange OSRP and, if necessary, complete an update to be eligible to apply.

