

City officials and local conservation advocates hold grand opening of Spring Run Trail

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SARATOGA SPRINGS — After 14 years of planning, and about six months of construction, the 1.2 mile Spring Run Trail was officially opened Thursday afternoon by city officials and local conservation advocates.

"In Saratoga Springs, open space does not take a back seat," Mayor Scott Johnson said, calling the trail a "hallmark project" because of the cooperation between city, state and federal officials with private businesses and environmental groups.

Construction of the trail, which runs from the intersection of East Avenue and Excelsior Avenue to the Northway, was funded last year by a \$1.6 million federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grant.

"Even in tough economic times, there are things we can do to advance these initiatives," Johnson said, adding that the project would not have gone forward had it not been "shovel ready" when federal funds became available.

The trail was conceived by the Saratoga Springs Open Space Project, which merged in 2003 with the Land Trust of the Saratoga Region to create Saratoga PLAN (Preserving Land and Nature), which had partnered with the city to complete the project.

"The trail has been amazingly popular right off the bat," said PLAN Executive Director Maria Trabka, saying the organization has been involved with the project since it was first envisioned.

"It is visionary for communities to recognize how much open space is an important part of their lives and the economic health of the community," said Alane Ball Chinian, former executive director of Open Space Project and PLAN and current Saratoga-Capital Region Director of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

"It's certainly the East Side connector for the city," she said of the trail, adding that it was part of the city and county trail plans that call for the eventual creation of a pedestrian walkway from Saratoga Spa State Park to Schuylerville.

She said there is grant funding available to complete the Route 50 corridor gateway project, which would connect Spa State Park to the Railroad Run Trail. The Spring Run Trail is planned to eventually cut under the Northway, connecting to Wilton's shopping areas and eventually to the Bog Meadow Trail.

City Engineer Paul Male noted that because the new trail was constructed on top of what was formally a railroad bed, the slight elevation coupled with culverts and drainage added as part of the construction will keep rainwater from flooding the paved trail.

"This one's high and dry," Male said of the trail, adding that state and federal conservation agencies had been consulted prior to construction.

According to literature provided by project design engineers AECOM, historic elements have been worked into the trail, including stone bridge abutments over Excelsior Springs Avenue and the original railroad mileage markers.

"You're not going to believe what you see when you go down there," Public Works Commissioner Anthony "Skip" Scirocco said, noting that he would use the trail as he lives nearby.

"Someday, hopefully there will be a hole through the Northway," he said, mentioning the trail's planned extension into Wilton, which was met with applause.

"Our role now is recruiting volunteers who want to help maintain the trail," said Trabka, noting that several residents, including those who already maintain the Railroad Run Trail on the city's southwest side, have already shown interest in helping keep the trail clean.

"It's been a long haul," she said. "It's nice to stop and celebrate it."