



## Friends Participating in the 350th Parade

The Friends of Schell Bridge participated in the town of Northfield's 350 birthday parade on September 30th, 2023 with a float featuring a model of the Schell bridge. The float celebrated the history of the bridge which encompassed the past, the present and the future. Most importantly, it represented the connection between East and West Northfield.

The float showcased the model of the bridge, with half of the bridge being the old bridge, and the other half the new bridge. This model was meticulously built by Jerry Wagener. The float was constructed by Steve Roberto, Elizabeth Bonney and David Kelley.

Walking with the float along the parade route were Barbara Richardson, Joanne McGee, Elizabeth Bonney and her grandson Maverick.

— Kathy Coutu



Pictured is Joanne McGee and Barbara Richardson.

## Board Members Lead Advocacy

In late September, grant application for the "Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods" was submitted to the U.S. Department of Transportation. Following on the advice of Anne Gobi at the 2023 Annual Meeting, the Board of Directors launched a campaign for contacting the Massachusetts Congressional Delegation for support. Emails, via Constant Contact, were sent to FSB members with suggested script and contact information; there was outreach to town committees and businesses. Several board members joined a zoom conference with staffers from the offices of Senators Markey and Warren to make the case and raise greater awareness of the bridge project. This outreach was initiated and organized by officials from the Town of Northfield, during which FSB provided history, positive impacts, and summarized Rails to Trails projects in MA. Town Administration gave supporting data and information.

Your support and advocacy is vital to realizing the vision of a river crossing that connects East and West, promoting recreational tourism, economic development, and low carbon transportation.



Proposed Schell Bridge design.

**Below is contact information for you to lend your voice.**

**U.S. Representative McGovern:** 413-341-8700  
[www.mcgovern.house.gov/contact](http://www.mcgovern.house.gov/contact) (Email Me)

**Senator Markey:** 413-785-4610  
[markey.senate.gov/contact/share-your-opinion](http://markey.senate.gov/contact/share-your-opinion)

**Senator Warren:** 413-788-2690  
[warren.senate.gov/contact/share-your-opinion](http://warren.senate.gov/contact/share-your-opinion)

Friends of Schell Bridge remains dedicated to the goal of a new pedestrian/bike pathway across the CT River and will remain proactive while the Town, the Advisory Committee, MassDOT, and state representatives develop ways to move forward. Members, near and far, help to keep us engaged, enthusiastic, and committed. Your continued support is greatly appreciated.

Thank you.

— Barbara Richardson



## Newsletter - December 2023

### New Rural Affairs leader: 'Go for the big money'

#### Anne Gobi headlines Annual Meeting

NORTHFIELD — Anne Gobi, the first director of the state's new Rural Affairs office ("an office of one," she quipped), is all in on a new Schell Bridge for bicyclists and pedestrians. To make that happen, Gobi said, "We need the larger pockets of the federal government," adding that "the state will make sure that matches are covered." Gobi was the keynote speaker at the Friends of Schell Bridge's Annual Meeting on Oct. 28, 2023, hosted by 4 Star Farms and attended by approximately 30 people.



Gobi said that the Healey-Driscoll administration has created a special office for infrastructure, such as bridges and, with \$17B coming out of the Federal government, "Why shouldn't Massachusetts get some of that?"

In her new position, Gobi serves as an advocate for the economic development of rural communities. "There's no question bridges come down to economic development."

Friends of Schell Bridge board member Craig Della Penna pointed out that, "Behind bridges come bicyclists — otherwise known as 'wallets on wheels'" — and urged Northfield to think regionally, with Vermont and New Hampshire, to make our federal grant application as compelling as possible. "It's very unusual that there



## Thank you, Steve Roberto!

For your six years on the Board of Directors. Leaving the Board to focus on his other community service work, Steve reassures us he'll "still be around." Pictured is Steve in a trendy blue t-shirt and

ball cap featuring the iconic Schell Bridge. These items are for sale \$20/\$25 and can be purchased by contacting Barbara: [brichardson71363@gmail.com](mailto:brichardson71363@gmail.com).

*Annual Meeting . . . Continued from cover.*

are four bridges around here that have been taken out of service, but they are in three states."

Selectboard member Barbara Jacques noted that the theme of Northfield's 350th anniversary is "Reconnecting Northfield," a goal this bridge connecting East and West Northfield would fulfill.

Mallory Sullivan, grant development director for the town, told the gathering that, "With each (grant) application, our proposals get stronger and stronger. The next step is talking to legislators. Tell them why this project is important to Northfield."

### Now is the time to express our support



"The money's there now," Gobi said, "So this is the time to make our advocacy as strong as possible."

The RCN (Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods) grant application from the town of Northfield is progressing through the channels, so FSB Chair Barbara Richardson said, "Now is the time to express our support" with a phone call to Rep. Jim McGovern, and Massachusetts Senators Edward Markey and Elizabeth Warren. (See elsewhere in this newsletter for details.)

— Christine Harris

## All this talk about bikes and pedestrians . . .

What is going on in this realm. What is happening from a higher-up viewpoint. Did you know that within 150 miles of Northampton lies the densest network of former steam railroad corridor in the US? This network led to huge old mill complexes that today are being repurposed as condos or apartments or start up businesses. The conversion from rail to trail brings benefits to communities. Here's an example.

Did you know that a trail is being developed across the state from Boston to Northampton? Mass Central Rail Trail. Over 40 years ago the Mass State Parks agency, formerly called Department of Environmental Management (DEM) planted a seed and bought the western-most 8-mile-long section of this 104± mile former railroad corridor — and redeveloped it into a biking/walking trail.

Over the ensuing years DCR's project in the CT River Valley — called "Norwottuck Rail Trail" — has slowly grown into an idea of creating a state-wide project with a unifying name: MASS CENTRAL RAIL TRAIL; Boston to Northampton. This name mirrors the original name of the railroad — MASSACHUSETTS CENTRAL RAILROAD.

Today, over 90 miles of the land of this former railroad is now in some sort of public or protected status. That is to say; a state agency, or a municipality, or one of a few linear thinking land trusts are now preserving it from being segmented or damaged. Of that protected mileage, 60 miles are now open and safe for families to enjoy. Twelve more miles are under construction right now. In two years, we'll be around 70-75 miles open.

However, getting to 104± miles open will be expensive to build out. For example, several long bridges will need to be replaced. Corridor acquired. There is even a 1,000' tunnel that needs renovations etc. Recently the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) commissioned a "feasibility study" of the gaps. Is it even possible to reassemble the missing pieces? To "fill-the-gaps" as they say. The report said that it was feasible, but it will be complicated. <https://tinyurl.com/MCRT-Study1>. If I can use a bit of railroad jargon, we are now at a "junction"

To have the state commit large sums of public money to 'fill-the-gaps' begs these important questions. What would it mean to have a completed Mass Central Rail Trail? A trail that directly connects with 18 other trails. Will the investment of large sums of public dollars be worth it? The Norwottuck Network-(NN) — a 501c3 setup over 20 years ago to help build out the 100+ mile long trail — commissioned a report this year to answer that question. The link to that fascinating report is here

<https://tinyurl.com/MCRT-Report>. You'll see that finishing the rail trail will be worth the public expenditure because of the compelling metrics found.

- Between 4-5 million users a year.
- 960,000 visitors just in Worcester County.
- About 500,000 overnight visitors a year.
- \$200 million a year in economic impacts.

If you are interested in learning more about this developing network, there is an archive of past e-newsletters about this at [www.MassCentralRailTrail.org](http://www.MassCentralRailTrail.org). Click on the monthly newsletter button.

**Proposed Tri-State Trail Network**  
 Craig Della Penna 413-575-2277 SchellBridge.org  
 CraigDP413@gmail.com

The older Rt 9 Bridge built in 1937 and seen on the far right has been replaced by a newer bridge, (seen here under-construction). It is now open to only bikes, pedestrians and other recreational uses.

In the southwest corner of New Hampshire, the southeast corner of Vermont and across the northern tier of Massachusetts lies over 100 miles of interconnected, unused former railroads and low-volume country roads.

In a 13 miles stretch of the Connecticut River there will be four former highway and railroad bridges across the river that could be upgraded to be used by bicyclists, pedestrians and other recreationalists. This represents a golden opportunity to create a network of off-road and low-volume roads that would be a resource for all the residents of the region. The effort to create this network is called the Tri-State Trail Initiative.

Built in 1920, the Rt 119 Bridge is slated to be taken out of service and become open to only bikes and peds by 2024 when a new bridge is constructed and the rail-w-trail project is finally permitted and built.

Built in 1913 by the B&M Railroad, the Fort Hill Branch Bridge was taken out of service in 1983 and will be made into a bike-ped bridge around 2024 when the new Rt. 119 bridge is constructed and the rail-w-trail project is finally permitted and built.

Two views of the Schell Bridge

The Schell Bridge at Northfield, built in 1904, is the 4th bridge in this group. Having four bridges, open only to bicycles, pedestrians in a 13 mile stretch of one of the most scenic rivers in North America will be remarkable. This is something that would easily be marketable for bike tourists looking for an unforgettable experience.

