

HAPPY TRAILS



Kathryn Prybylski, with Groundwork Lawrence, is the project manager for the Spicket River Greenway.

ANGIE BEAULIEU/Staff photo

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Lawrence receives \$2.6 million for Spicket River trail system

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LAWRENCE — Most people in the city only notice the Spicket River when it is flooding their basements or when they have to cross over it on a bridge.

But for a local environmental advocacy group, the river could become the home to an "emerald bracelet" of trails that loop through densely populated neighborhoods, following the river and drawing people to its shoreline and wildlife to its waters.

Earlier this month, Groundwork Lawrence, a local nonprofit group, along with the city, received a \$2.6 million state grant aimed at building a 2.5-mile long network of trails linking six new and existing parks to create one, continuous urban park from Methuen to the Merrimack River.

"Restoring the Spicket River corridor and converting it into a community asset was one of our organization's founding objectives," said Heather McMann, executive director of Groundwork Lawrence. "The Greenway will improve long underserved residents' access to the river and to quality open spaces."

The so-called Spicket River Greenway will start at Manchester Street park, near the old Malden Mills site, and wind through some of the poorest neighborhoods of Lawrence.

The Greenway was first envisioned more than a decade ago as a means of providing access to the river, a distinctive environmental feature of North Lawrence.

A number of other goals will be achieved with the Greenway, including river restoration, neighborhood revitalization, civic engagement, improved public health and increased recreational opportunity, according to a Groundwork Lawrence press release on the grant.

"This project will open the doors to community recreation and neighborhood revitalization," Mayor William Lantigua said. "The river way is a true asset, and with this partnership, all will soon realize Lawrence's gem."

One of the first parks developed along the river was Dr. Nina Scarito Park, a 2.7-acre park that led to the development of four more parks along the river, including a skate park for local youth, and school yard gardens.

In addition to the quality of life improvements, the parks are supporting broader economic benefits, according to Groundwork Lawrence.

Between 2000 and 2004, property values around Scarito Park more than doubled — a larger increase than in other Lawrence neighborhoods. And according to police, crime fell markedly in the area.

And when the foreclosure crisis began in 2006, the combination of parks and homeownership investments

helped stabilize the low-income area.

The grant was issued by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs on July 7, and is part of a larger, \$6 million allotment doled out to low-income communities throughout the state.

The five communities receiving Gateway City Parks grants included Chicopee, Fitchburg, Lawrence, Pittsfield and Taunton.

"I know from growing up in Chicago that parks make a big difference in city life," Gov. Deval Patrick said. "These Gateway City Parks projects will invigorate neighborhoods and improve the lives of our residents."

Funding for this grant program comes from the Energy and Environment Bond Bill signed by Patrick in August 2008.

"This is great news for Lawrence," said state Sen. Susan Tucker, D-Andover, whose district includes Lawrence. "Groundwork has a solid track record of creating parks and green spaces that add so much to the quality of life in the city."

"I am excited that the city of Lawrence will be receiving these funds to pay for work on the Spicket River Greenway," added state Rep. Barry Finegold. "This grant will continue to help with regional growth and prosperity in Lawrence, and improve the lives and futures of its residents."