

Bicycle enthusiast pitches idea for trail to Kent Falls

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KENT — Kent resident Sal Lilienthal has just finished a project with the Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area that mapped five bicycle routes in town.

Now he's working on developing support for a recreational trail that would extend from the center of town to Kent Falls State Park.

"It would connect the town of Kent with Kent Falls and provide a safe way to get there," he said. Lilienthal owns the Bicycle Tour Company, which he's operated in Kent for 12 years providing tours, rentals and bike sales.

Lilienthal approached selectmen and the Planning and Zoning Commission last week for letters of support for the "Housatonic Covered Bridge Trail." Both groups agreed to support the idea of a bike trail that would be open to other recreational uses, such as in-line skating, walking and running.

"Support will put us in a better position for applying for grants," Lilienthal told zoning commissioners Thursday.

Member Dennis DePaul complimented him on his work.

"I like what you're doing and I really appreciate what you're doing," he said. "Bike paths should be part of the Plan of Conservation and Development."

The trail as Lilienthal envisions it would start on the west side of the river, go along River Road and cross the river where the former North Kent Bridge was located. He said that he's run into some resistance from officials at the National Park Service, who control the Appalachian Trail there.

"The National Park Service people are reluctant to support a bike bath with the A.T. because it might set a precedent in other states," Lilienthal said, noting he's not

giving up and is continuing to try to work with the park service.

National Park Service spokesman Phil Sheridan of the Northeast Regional Office said he couldn't comment on the specific bike trail but in general the agency is very cautious about sharing the hiking and biking trails.

"We worry about the safety of the hikers and maintaining the trail," Sheridan said.

After it crosses the river, Lilienthal would like to see the trail parallel the railroad tracks and then cross under Route 7 with a culvert ending at Kent Falls. Eventually, Lilienthal said, some bicyclers envision a trail that would follow the Housatonic River, continuing north through Vermont to Canada.