

# Along the Greenway — and Beyond!

By Deb Crossley, City Councilor

**Editor’s Note:** The following is a follow-up to Jim Lerner’s “Newton Upper Falls Greenway” article in the Conservators’ Summer 2017 newsletter.

**N**ewton Conservators’ Environmentalists of the Year George Kirby, Jim Lerner, and Jerry Reilly provided an invaluable service to the city in their successful efforts to conceive and ‘pave the way’ to achieve the linear park we call the Upper Falls Greenway.

Our Greenway is a much beloved community asset, improving the quality of life in Upper Falls today — and leveraging great potential for the future. It is a pleasantly calm, healthy, and refreshing way to get around to Needham Street shops and restaurants, Upper Falls village, and the Charles River—from Elliot Street and beyond.

There is also an ongoing and long list of efforts and projects to continue to restore and improve the landscape — as well as to extend the trail to key destinations. Many abutting property owners have taken a special interest in improving and maintaining portions of the Greenway that border their properties and offering points of access. Here’s what is happening now — and some of what may be on the horizon.

## Getting to Needham Street

Perhaps the most exciting work to date that will expand access to the Greenway is that related to the Newton



Map graphic courtesy of Margaret Alexander.  
To view online: <http://www.upperfallsgreenway.org>



Deb Crossley speaks about the Upper Falls Greenway

Nexus project, which will open this fall. CrossPoint developers have been unusually responsive, reliable collaborators, and terrific neighbors. The City Council conditioned their special permit to include removing invasive species all along Meadow Brook, where the old spur (which they own) was and along their 800’ border to the Greenway as well.

You’ll already see an assortment of new native trees (26) and bushes (28) along the Greenway path! In addition, they will be creating a strong link to Needham Street by constructing a new 10’-foot wide stone dust path along the brook, then restoring the brook to include new native plantings. All work along Meadow Brook must be approved by the Conservation Commission.

As Jim Lerner said in a previous article, the trail currently ends at Easy Street, just before National Lumber. The owners of the building complex to the east of Easy Street, KSPartners, petitioned in 2014 to expand uses in these buildings. The Council conditioned the special permit to require special attention to the border of the Greenway, a public easement down Easy Street, protected egress point from the Greenway, and clear signage. The parking lot by NewTV (a tenant), which is 20 feet onto the MBTA right of way, is leased from the MBTA. Two years have passed



PHOTO: KEN MALLORY

*City workers apply a new surface of crushed stone along the so-called “spur” that leads to Needham Street.*

Nexus and NewTV is Avalon Bay Residences, which share about 1,000 feet of the border. The old MBTA fence remains on most of this, and is set into the 80-foot right of way about 20 feet. Avalon residents love the Greenway, and



PHOTO: KEN MALLORY

*The entrance to Avalon Bay Residences lies along Needham Street in Newton.*

a gateway was installed on the eastern end of the property last year. Also last year, Carol Stapleton and I walked the path with Avalon president Bill McLaughlin, who is also a Newton resident. Avalon is already working with CrossPoint to create pathways between the residences and the new Nexus shopping area. But the Greenway inspires a new way of connecting to the outdoors.

Prior to Newton Serves day, Avalon landscapers cut down most of the large bittersweet vines threatening the mature stand of (mostly oak) trees, and removed barbed wire from the fence. About 30 Avalon resident volunteers stuffed and

since the special permit was granted and acted upon, so the City Council voted in August to take the easement by eminent domain. Now the Parks Department will build an accessible ramp up to the egress point at the top of Easy Street, finally allowing accessible travel.

### Sharing Access!

Between CrossPoint’s

carted 150 bags of debris on Newton Serves day! There are plans to complete this work, remove the remaining fence, and install a second gate to align with the Avalon Promenade.

Perhaps one of the biggest eyesores along the trail was the city’s own DPW yard, which at one point had a small mountain of excavate and trash from road constructions spilling over into the right of way. Over the last year, DPW



PHOTO: JIM LERNER

*The NewTV headquarters in Newton lies adjacent to the Greenway path seen here in the foreground.*

has worked industriously to clean up and reorganize the yard. The excavate has been removed from the right of way and reduced to a working pile 1/10 the size on site, behind an abutment more clearly marking the boundary. A new fence is planned.

Volunteers have made a dent cutting back the invasive vines.

Working with Carol and Julie Irish of the Upper Falls Area Council, we’ve also achieved some success reducing private encroachments onto the right of way, and assuring compliance with pre-existing leases and special permits.

Longer term, there’s still much to be done, with exciting possibilities ahead. Newton planners, Councilors, and economic development experts and developers seeking new projects are discussing what it will take to create an accessible way up to Elliot Street, and how to extend the Greenway past National Lumber to Curtis Street - to provide continuous pathways to the Elliot and Highlands T stops. There is as well the possibility of crossing into Needham by restoring an existing bridge over the river off Christina Street, which Needham is interested in pursuing as well. Although it is a long way off, the Northland developers have big plans, are eager to find and help create alternative transportation routes, and are making the entire area more pedestrian and bike friendly (see October 29th walk on page 15). ■