

THE PORTLAND AIR LINE TRAIL



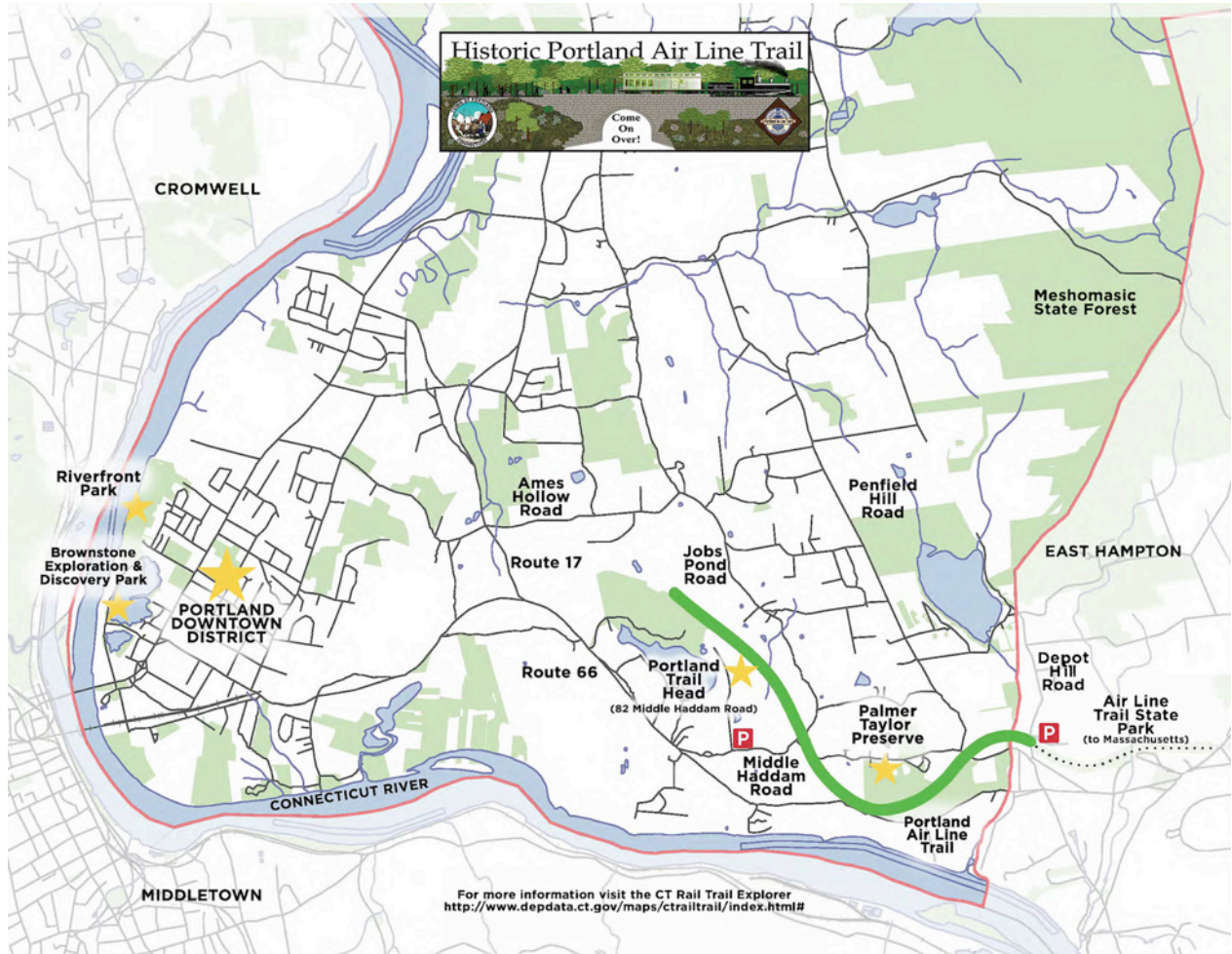
The Town of Portland is proud to announce that the first stage of the Historic Portland Air Line Trail is now open to the public. Phase 1 of the trail runs about 2.3 miles from Depot Hill Road near Old Middletown Road to a point adjacent to YMCA Camp Ingersoll. The main parking area and access point is located at 82 Middle Haddam Road. Additional parking is available at Depot Hill Road.

The trail itself is made up of a gravel base and topped with compacted stone dust. Several descriptive displays highlight notable points of history along the trail. A set of public hiking paths on the Palmer Taylor Preserve can be accessed from the Air Line Trail – a marker sign and map along the trail indicates the access point.

The Air Line Trail is open to the public daily from dawn till dusk. As a linear multiuse park trail, it is strictly intended for non-motorized recreational use only such as cyclists, pedestrians, equestrians, and cross-country skiers in the winter. Users of the trail are asked to stay on the trail itself, as most adjacent property is private (except for the Palmer Taylor Preserve). The trail will be treated like other parks in town: overseen by the Parks & Recreation Department, maintained by the Public Works Department, and patrolled by the Portland Police Department.

As of August 2018, final work on some portions of the Portland trail is still on going while the trail is open. Also, Portland's trail should soon connect to the current 53-mile long Air Line State Park Trail that runs from East Hampton to the Massachusetts border. The state and East Hampton are currently working to bring the trail to Portland. Please be aware that the section of the trail heading from Depot Hill Road towards East Hampton is not yet open to the public. Completion is anticipated by the end of fall 2018.

The town, under the guidance of the Portland Air Line Trail Steering Committee, has started work on Phase 2 of the Portland trail with a goal of continuing west to downtown Portland, the bridge to Middletown, and the riverfront park area. But at this point, all sections of the trail from YMCA Camp Ingersoll west are private property, not developed, and not open to the public.



Map of Portland and stage one of the Portland Air Line Trail. Map designed by Kevin Grindle.



Town and State Officials Cut the Ribbon Opening the Portland Air Line Trail on June 3, 2018.

HISTORY

The Portland Air Line Trail is on land formerly used by the Boston-New York Air Line Railroad that ran between New York and Boston between 1873 and 1955. The line was originally intended to be the most direct and quickest route between the two major cities, like a 'line drawn through the air,' which is where it got the name, "Air Line." During the 1890's, the railroad started featuring white and gold painted trains to attract luxury passengers. This made the trains have a ghost-like glow at night and led to them being referred to as "Ghost Trains." Due to storm damage and reduced use, most of the Connecticut portion of the railroad ceased operations in the late 1950's and the section east of Portland was abandoned during the 1960's – although the section from Portland to New Haven is still in operation today. The Connecticut section east of Portland was taken over by the State of Connecticut and trail development began in the 1980's. Due to differing interests at the time, the section in Portland was sold to private property owners and the electric utility company, CL&P (now Eversource Energy).

In the 1990's, Portland's Town Planner at the time, Nancy Woodhouse-Mueller, conducted the first research study on developing the Air Line rail route in Portland as a rails-to-trails initiative. Citizens involved in the Portland Environment Watch group helped advocate for its development. Unfortunately, these early efforts were unsuccessful. Then, in 2012, Deanna Rhodes, Portland's former town planner, drafted the first formal plan to develop the trail in Portland. In 2013, she was joined by John Shafer and John Hall of the Jonah Center for Earth and Art who began advocating for the trail through a series of public presentations and partnerships with other organizations and agencies including, the Portland Brownstone Quorum, the Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments, and the Portland Planning Group.

In 2014, these efforts led the Portland Board of Selectmen to form an official Air Line Trail Steering Committee initially led by John Shafer and later led by Rosario Rizzo and Louis Pear. Working closely with First Selectwoman, Susan Bransfield, and other town departments, the committee hired an engineering consultant, developed a site plan, signed a license agreement with Eversource Energy, applied for and received a trail grant from CT-DEEP, and hired engineering and construction companies to design and build the trail.

On October 28, 2017, a groundbreaking ceremony was held to celebrate the beginning of construction of Phase 1 of the trail. On June 3, 2018, a ribbon-cutting ceremony was held at the new trail head on Middle Haddam Road commemorating the official opening of the trail.

Special Acknowledgements

Phase 1 of the Portland Air Line Trail is made possible because of a lease agreement with Eversource Energy, who owns the land, and a grant from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT-DEEP). Many individuals and organizations contributed to the development of the trail. The town would like to especially acknowledge the following:

Volunteer Members of the Portland Air Line Trail Steering Committee:

Rosario (Riz) Rizzo, Chair

Steve Byrne

Steve Crusberg

Chantal Foster

Kathy Herron

Tom Ladny

John Shafer

Alternates:

Bill Flood

Carol Winiski

Individuals and Organizations:

Susan Bransfield, Portland First Selectwoman
Laurie Giannotti, CT DEEP, State Parks Division, Trails & Greenways Program
Jamie Litner, Eversource Energy
Kevin Grindle, Anchor Engineering Consultant
Louis Pear, BOS, former Co-Chair of ALTSC
Deanna Rhodes, former Portland Town Planner
Geoff Jacobson & Katie Mercer, Nathan L. Jacobson & Associates
Pat Dichello, Dichello Construction Co.
John Hall and The Jonah Center for Earth & Art
Christie Carpino, Connecticut State Representative
James Tripp and The Brownstone Quorum
Sean Dwyer & Portland Parks & Recreation Dept.
Rick Kelsey and Portland Public Works Dept.
Dave Kuzminski & Kevin Armstrong, Town Technology
Michelle Ceppaglia, Executive Secretary, Town of Portland
Andy Bauer (who designed our banner)
Elwin Guild and the Portland Planning Group
Michelle Rulnick & Ben Silliman, YMCA
Portland Complete Streets Group
Spectra Energy / Enbridge

Current & Former Members of the Portland Board of Selectmen:

Susan Bransfield - First Selectwoman
Louis Pear - Deputy First Selectman
Michael Pelton
Edward Sharr
Benjamin Srb
James Tripp
Ralph Zampano
Kathleen Richards
Fredrick Knous
Kitch Czernicki
Brian Flood
Carl Chudzik

