

Daily Hampshire Gazette

Est. 1786

Clearing the path: Tree removal signals the start of long-awaited Mill River Greenway by Samuel Gelinas April 3, 2026 WILLIAMSBURG — After more than 14 years of debate over safety and land easements, the Mill River Greenway is finally gaining momentum.

Construction is now in high gear following the removal of 50 white pines by the town's Highway Department. While the trees stood in the path of the new trail, Highway Superintendent Dan Banister noted that many were already rotted and posed a risk.

After considering six total bids, the Select Board Tuesday unanimously voted for North Hatfield-based Western Earthworks LLC to serve as the contractor for the project. The company's bid proposal was below budget at \$1.9 million. Other bids included ones from the firms of Baltazar Contractors Inc. of Ludlow, Taylor Davis Landscape Co. Inc. of Amherst. There is more than \$2 million in the bank for the project, with much of the funding coming from the state Department of Transportation.

Select Board member Paul Wetzels contacted references for Western Earthworks and received a positive response. Interim Town Administrator Elizabeth Van Iderstine said she had talked to the owners of the company, Mariel Lima and Jack Henderson-Adams, as well.

"I spoke to the owner [Mariel] this morning. ... she's delightful," said Iderstine. "She and her partner Jack are absolutely delighted to be working with the town."

The first section of work will begin at the dismount of the current Mass Central Rail Trail, go to the Mill River bridge on South Main Street, and continue north to the intersection on Bridge Street.

The design features an 8-foot shared-use path alongside road reconstruction and the installation of new speed bumps. While the project is underway, specific timelines and a projected completion date were unavailable at presstime.

For years, the most controversial corner of the project has revolved around a 1,700-foot section of South Main Street, between the town's bridges and the Northampton bike trail. Some residents along that stretch have contended the trail would pose a safety hazard with bicyclists riding past the end of their driveways.

But a special Town Meeting in November sealed the deal for the project when the community approved giving temporary and permanent easements to property along South Main Street in a 265-211 vote.

According to the Select Board's discussion on Tuesday, a transportation bond totals \$2.3 million, which is funding all work along South Main Street. A MassWorks grant of \$204,000 has been used for design, and a complete streets grant of up to \$500,000, will be going toward the trail's switchback, which will reduce water volume.

Driving by on South Main Street this week, Mary Valentin, a social worker who takes care of four special needs women at a nearby ServiceNet home, expressed her excitement about the project since the women she takes care of already enjoy the existing trails in town that will now be connected by this latest project.

"I think it's good. People need to get out there, get more active, and just get back to the roots of life — like we've really gotten lost in technology and stuff over time," she said. Mary Valentin, an employee of Service Net, slowed down to look at the tree work that is the start of the work on the Greenway in Williamsburg along South Main Street. Valentin is excited to use the trail that will continue along the river. CAROL LOLLIS / Staff Photo

