

Trail Aims To Connect Manasquan Reservoir To Manasquan Beach

By **Sara Grillo** - October 30, 2017



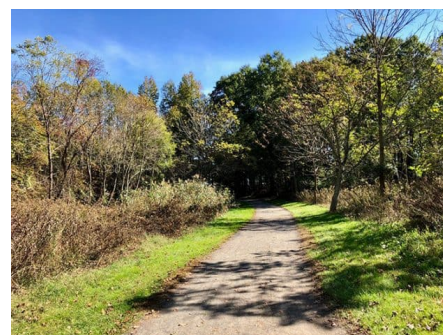
In Monmouth County, the Capital to the Coast Trail would connect walkers and riders from the Manasquan Reservoir to Manasquan Beach. (Photo by Sara Grillo)

HOWELL – The township is making strides in developing some existing trail ways in the Bear Swamp Natural Area, which will also push along the Capital to the Coast Trail, a project that’s been 16 years in the making.

Former Manasquan councilman Fred Lockenmeyer and his late friend Dr. Rudy Buser, both active bicyclists, dreamed up a trail back in 2001 that would extend 55 miles lengthwise across the state of New Jersey, from the capital to the coastline.

As of five years ago, about 20 miles of the entire trail have been completed.

With some donated land in Manasquan, a 7-mile stretch of its path already extends for two miles in Allaire State Park, then another five miles out to the sand in Manasquan Beach.



When it comes to Howell, after the trail spins around the 5-mile Manasquan Reservoir, it continues on for a bit, but then it stops. Grant money would help develop it through Bear Swamp on its path toward Wall, and eventually connect it to Allaire State Park.

(Photo by Sara Grillo)

Elisabeth Naskiewicz of the Lake Restoration & Wildlife Management Committee wanted to know more information about the grant, concerned by the term "bicycle trail" and what that would mean for a natural area like Bear Swamp, which she said was created to be used for activities like mountain biking and hiking.

"I have all those questions and a lot more," answered Councilwoman Pauline Smith, adding that it's unusual for the council to vote on something with such little information.

"I don't see a paved wide bicycle trail going through the major heavy duty wetlands that it would take to get to Allaire Park," said Naskiewicz.

Community Development Director Jim Herrman confirmed that the trail is a "non-motorized multi-use trail network" that would move through existing trail networks, so wetlands are not a concern. The DEP also allows 6-foot-wide trails through wetlands as long as existing drainage patterns are maintained, he said.

There would be paved areas near Route 547 and along Maxim Road, but other than that, the majority of the trail would be comprised of compacted quarry dust so it could accommodate many types of recreation, even horses.

"If we're putting it through Bear Swamp Natural Area, before we put any money out, can we finish the job within a realistic cost?" Naskiewicz asked.



(Photo by Sara Grillo)

Herrman shared that the township applied for \$900,000 under the Department of Transportation's Bikeway Grant Program. The program sets aside \$1 million for the construction of bike trails, with a goal of building 1,000 new miles of dedicated bike paths. That said, Herrman warned that they typically award only 3 to 4 grants within the entire state.

"This is a very competitive application process," he said.

The application covers 2.25 new miles of multi-use trail, so even if the township is awarded only \$300,000 or \$400,000, Herrman said the project can be scaled back to a more realistic approach.

Peter Hagemeyer of Point Pleasant Beach, Chairman of the Capital to the Coast Trail, reassured Naskiewicz that the trail is designed for pedestrians, runners, children, people with strollers, equestrians and horses.

“We don’t discriminate,” he said.

Hagemeyer said the 7-mile existing path that stretches from Allaire State Park to Manasquan Beach is used by people in many communities already, including himself. He rides on it 14 miles a day to work and sees kids walking through to leave high school or to walk up to tennis courts. In the summer he sees families on it carrying surfboards, and in the fall there are horses trotting through Allaire State Park.

Although he and Lockenmeyer have hopes to extend its path clear across the state, the few miles that Howell contributes will at least fill in a missing link.

Herrman said the overall plan is to connect the trail from the Manasquan Reservoir to Manasquan Beach. Howell received a grant a few years ago to connect Oak Glen Park to the reservoir, and this is the next phase.

“We’re the missing hole right now between that connection,” said Herrman.

So far, Wall Township has done a majority of the work in pursuing grants and building up the trail in their neck of the woods, and they will now hold off on pursuing any additional funding until Howell makes some progress.



(Photo by Sara Grillo)

Residents of Howell were supportive of the Coast Trail, specifically father-daughter combo Bill Hitzel and his daughter Andrea Brennan, who talked about how difficult it’s become to ride bikes around town with the rising traffic.

Hitzel has lived in Howell for 47 years, and said he used to be able to go out on the roads and ride bikes in relative safety. These days, he said, it’s impossible even as an adult to go out on

the local roads on two wheels.

His daughter Andrea lives in Manasquan now, but she said growing up in Howell she and her family would take a yearly summer ride from Howell to Manasquan.

“It was always very exciting when we got on the portion of the bike path that was paved in Manasquan because we didn’t have to worry about cars and it was a lot of fun,” she said.

She and her husband now use the bike path in Manasquan to get to the gym, to Allaire State Park, and to Trenton and the D&R Canal.

“Since the Manasquan trail has been extended through Allaire the traffic on the bike path has really increased a lot,” she added, noting that she’s seen kids, parents and elderly people walking or riding on the trail.

Andrea would love to see more kids get out on the path just to roller blade or ride their bikes, as it’s a great escape from the traffic, and since she’s personally been hit by motorists while riding her bike.

In August, Lockenmeyer organized a Friends of the Capital to the Coast Trail meeting that was attended by over 45 people, including Howell Councilwoman Evelyn O’Donnell and Community Development Director Herrman, along with Manasquan Councilman Jeff Lee and Executive Director of the NJ Bike and Walk Coalition Cyndi Steiner, who was positive about the amount of grant money available to communities for bike trail development.

Since then, many volunteers have also signed on to research and apply for grants, plan activities to promote the trail, and attend council meetings in townships the trail runs through. To volunteer, reach out to fredlocken@aol.com.

“It’s a great trail that connects New Jersey and connects people,” said Hagemeyer.

Connecting the two, it seems, is easier said than done.

Sara Grillo

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