

NEWS

Williamsburg voters OK easements clearing way for rail trail project

Unlike in June when the issue led to shouting matches, Saturday's special Town Meeting was peaceful; with a final vote of 265-211



by Samuel Gelinas November 1, 2025



WILLIAMSBURG — Despite the animosity the topic has raised in the past, Saturday's special Town Meeting was smooth sailing when residents approved giving temporary and permanent easements to property along South Main Street by a 265-211 vote.

These easements were a necessary next step to begin construction on the Mill River Greenway, which has been in the works since 2012 and would create a trail connection between Northampton and Williamsburg. With the easements secured, it is likely construction could start on the Greenway in early spring, either March or April, according to Town Administrator Nick Caccamo.

Thus far, two of the three residents who are handing over the easements have signed a waiver. The only signature the town still needs is from the owners of 40 South Main St., which is at the intersection of Fort Hill Road and South Main Street. If the easement is not given to the town, then modifications would need to be made to the Greenway's existing plans to account for drainage.

The entire 2.5-mile stretch will be a two-way traffic street and one mixed-use bike lane. Before construction can begin the town must finalize plans, file a notice of intent with the Conservation Commission, and collect bids from contractors, said Caccamo.

The project has already been funded by a \$3,094,000 from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

This issue was divisive during June's special Town Meeting to the point of a shouting match, but on Saturday, residents saluted the town for keeping the peace throughout the morning.

Voters were still lined up outside well past 10 a.m. when the meeting started, and there was almost no breathing room in the packed auditorium at the Anne. T. Dunphy School. Some residents lined up and had three minutes to share their views ahead of the vote, with community input lasting for some 40 minutes before a vote was called at 11:15 a.m.

South Main Street residents J.M. Sorrell and Curt Hamilton were among those who stepped up to speak.

Sorrell said that the project will vastly improve the street, that property values will likely go up, and it will be safer for drivers and bikers.

Hamilton spoke against the project, saying that the street is fine the way it is now. "If it ain't broke don't fix it," he said.

The vote was conducted with a ballot box, and there was only mild celebration, just a couple cheers in the room, when it was announced the vote passed a simple majority.

"Happy to put the business behind us and move forward with what I think is overall a pretty good public works project," said Sam Tellman, minutes before the vote was announced. "And I think today went pretty well."

Praising Town Moderator Kayla Solomon for keeping everything under control, John Connolly said he was "delighted that the meeting was so much better than it was in June."

Council on Aging Director Melissa Wilson also appreciated the organization of the meeting, but said the last five people waiting in line to give their comments should have been able to speak because they waited. However, the majority of the room had voted to end the period of debate and motioned for a vote after about a dozen or so people gave their points of view.



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Resident Maureen O'Brien remains opposed to the greenway. She walks her dog along South Main Street and is concerned of being run over by bikes and e-bikes on the shared-use path being proposed. She is not alone, as those against the project have cited safety as their number one objection to the Greenway.

She, like others who spoke ahead of the vote, was confused by why there was only a simple majority required unlike in June when passage required a two-thirds approval.

Caroline Murry, an attorney from KP Law, the town's law firm, said the article up for a vote on Saturday involved a "friendly taking" rather than the town taking the land by eminent domain. Eminent domain requires a supermajority since it would require the town to compensate the owner. She also said that the word "purchase" was removed from the article presented in June. If there was a dollar amount involved, it would have required for voters to approve with a two-thirds majority.

O'Brien feels that this is "debatable" whether there should have been a majority or supermajority requirement. But regardless of her aversion, O'Brien praised the town for its organization on Saturday.

"I hope the bike path comes about and I hope everybody settles down," she said.