



CITY OF CONCORD

New Hampshire's Main Street™

REPORT TO MAYOR AND THE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Beth Fenstermacher, Director of Special Projects and Strategic Initiatives

DATE: December 19, 2025

SUBJECT: Authorizing the City Manager to apply for Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) grant funds from the U.S. Department of Transportation for the purpose of designing and constructing a portion of the Merrimack River Greenway Trail (CIP #543).

Recommendation

Accept this report and approve the attached resolution authorizing the City Manager to apply for Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) grant funds from the U.S. Department of Transportation for the purpose of designing and constructing portions of the Merrimack River Greenway Trail (CIP #543).

Background

Several years ago, the City created CIP #543 “Merrimack River Greenway Trail” (MRGT) within the City’s Capital Improvement Program for the purposes of facilitating the development of a 12.7-mile multi-use trail through Concord. In addition to providing recreational and multi-modal transportation benefits to City residents, the MRGT is important regionally as it will connect the Northern Rail Trail at the Boscawen town line to the north, and the future Pembroke Rail Trail at the southerly City line. Once completed, these connections would facilitate a continuous regional trail (known as the Granite State Rail Trail) from Salem NH to Lebanon NH.

To date, the City, working with the Friends of the MRGT (FMRGT), has secured grant funds to design and construct portions of the trail. Phase 1 was constructed at Terrill Park in 2020. Phase 2 was constructed at the Gully Hill Road agricultural fields in Summer 2024. The City currently has a signed Purchase & Sales Agreement with CSX Transportation to acquire approximately 5.2 miles of abandoned rail corridor for construction of a rail trail. In 2021, NHDOT approved a \$1.7 million Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) grant to construct that portion of the MRGT between Sewalls Falls Road and the Boscawen town line. In 2025, the boardwalk segment between Gully Hill Road and Terrill Park was selected by NHDOT for funding and was added to the NHDOT Ten-Year Plan. Funding for this segment is not guaranteed until the Governor signs in the plan in Summer 2026.

Additionally, the City, through its development permitting processes, has secured easements over private property at 11 Stickney Avenue, as well as Black Hill Road, to facilitate future construction of the MRGT. Easements at other properties are currently being negotiated. The City is also in the process of adding a 14' wide expansion of the Loudon Road Bridge across the Merrimack River to connect the MRGT from Gully Hill Road to future segments to be developed in the Downtown area. Further, the City is working with the NHDOT to construct those portions of the MRGT between the Merrimack River, Downtown, and Horseshoe Pond as part of the forthcoming I-93 Bow-Concord Project.

Approximately three non-contiguous miles of the 12.7-miles are funded for design and construction. The MRGT is an important alternative transportation and recreational infrastructure improvement for the City, and the key to success is the completion of a continuous trail.

Discussion

The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) released a Notice of Funding Opportunity for the federally funded BUILD program. The focus of the program is to provide grant funds for the planning or construction of surface transportation infrastructure projects that will improve safety; environmental sustainability; quality of life; mobility and community connectivity; economic competitiveness and opportunity including tourism; state of good repair; partnership and collaboration; and innovation. Applications are due February 24, 2026.

The Central NH Regional Planning Commission and FMRGT have committed to assisting with the preparation of the application materials. Applications submitted in 2024 and 2025 were unsuccessful; however, based on feedback from USDOT, the application was improved in 2025 to "Highly Recommended". City staff met with USDOT representatives again in 2025, and received valuable feedback which may improve the City's chances for a successful application in this upcoming funding round.

Based on the eligible activities of the program, staff recommends that the City apply for BUILD grant funds to design and construct currently unfunded portions of the MRGT to facilitate creation of a continuous trail system. Segments to the MRGT to be included as part of this application include: the rail trail between Horseshoe Pond Lane and Sewalls Falls Road; and, any supplemental connections, parking areas, and sidewalk connections identified during the design process.

The program funding is comprised of 100% federal funds with no local match required.