

STATE NEWS

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FARMINGTON CANAL

Plainville Heritage Trail Gap Funded

\$3.8 Million State Grant To Close Break In Hiking Path From Southington To Farmington

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PLAINVILLE — The popular Farmington Canal Heritage Trail is one step closer to being completed, thanks to a state grant that will close a gap in Plainville.

The \$3.8 million state grant, approved Friday by the state bond commission, will extend the trail about 4 miles through Plainville, closing a break in the trail between Farmington and Southington. It's the largest missing piece of the Connecticut portion of the 84-mile greenway that links New Haven with Northampton, Mass. It's currently about 60 percent complete.

Right now, the sole piece of complete

path in Plainville is a tiny section built by Farmington on Northwest Drive. Southington is in the process of designing the final section that will push its portion of the trail to the Plainville border.

"This is a significant step in the plan to 'close the gap' through Plainville," Town Manager Robert Lee said. "This funding will allow the Department of Transportation staff to design the path with significant input by town staff and the town council."

For 20 years, local bicycle advocates have lobbied to bridge the "Plainville Gap," a design challenge because active freight rail lines in town make it impossible to use old north-south rail beds as is done in other heritage trail communities.

As a result, cyclists passing through

town now end up traveling on sections of local roads.

Earlier this week, bicyclist Miki Latvis of Bristol was preparing for a 30-mile ride out of the Northwest Drive parking lot in Plainville.

"It would be good to get a trail through Plainville. It's not very safe now because drivers don't pay attention and are often distracted," Latvis said. She said her concerns about safe cycling keep her from biking often through Plainville to reach the southern link that ends by Long Island Sound in New Haven.

Timothy Malone, a planner with the regional Capital Region Council of Governments that was involved in the initial route studies that led to the grant, said it could

take 18 months or more for the design to be completed before construction can begin.

The state Department of Transportation will oversee the design work.

At recent Plainville town council meetings, several residents have repeated concerns about putting the trail on sections of Pierce and Broad streets. Residents said they oppose any trail on a local road because it would flood streets with cyclists and walkers, pose a danger to motorists and disrupt neighborhoods.

In preliminary trail route hearings in the last year, trail advocates and project officials said public comment will continue during the design period. Trail proponents said it is crucial to get public acceptance and backing of the final route.

DOWNTOWN BRISTOL

Hospital Foresees Spring Opening

Outpatient Center Work On Schedule

By **DON STACOM**
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BRISTOL — Area patients who need to see specialists could be using Bristol Hospital's new outpatient center as early as April, officials said Tuesday.

Contractors are on schedule with the 60,000-square-foot building, according to Brian Cich, chief operating officer of Rendina Healthcare Real Estate.

"There's some skin on the building. Now it's all about weather — we're racing winter, trying to beat the snow flying," Cich told a meeting of hospital executives, medical staff and local political leaders Tuesday morning.

"The second quarter of 2019 is what we're shooting for — it could be the beginning of the quarter or the end," Cich said.

Rendina is constructing the \$25.3 million building at Main and North Main streets, and will lease it to Bristol Hospital as a medical office complex and lab. About 50 doctors and physician assistants in the Bristol Hospital Multi-Specialty Group will see patients there.

Hospital staffers are looking to order furniture, signs and more this winter so the center is ready to open quickly after construction ends, President Kurt Barwis said. He's optimistic about an April opening.

The goal is to consolidate small offices and labs that are spread around the hospital's central Connecticut service area. Housing neurology, cardiology, endocrinology, orthopedics, rheumatology and urology specialists in one building will improve convenience for patients and foster collaboration between specialists, Barwis said.

The hospital emphasized that its roster of primary care physicians will keep working from their individual offices around the city and in Plainville, Southington, Burlington, Farmington, Wolcott, New Britain and Plymouth.

Barwis said he has already begun promoting the new ambulatory care center to physicians that he's trying to recruit to the region.

"We can talk about them being in a contemporary, state-of-the-art space where they can work with their colleagues. That's definitely making a difference," Barwis said.

The hospital posted a \$7 million loss last year, but is on course to finish this fiscal year with a profit, Barwis said. He credited its directors for seeking ways to expand rather than simply slash expenses.

"They didn't want to cut their way to the bottom line. They know you can't do that without hurting the heart of the hospital," he said.

The building is going up on one corner of the former Bristol Centre Square Mall property, which has been an unused eyesore since the city bought the failing mall and demolished it more than a decade ago. Bristol has built a roadway through the property and installed utilities to attract other developers for the rest of the land.

TURNING IT RIGHT-SIDE UP

A **TOW TRUCK** driver prepares to pull a flipped motor vehicle back onto its tires after the crash closed down a section of Zion and Summit streets in Hartford on Tuesday afternoon.



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STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGES

CSCU Touts Bookstore Deal

Ojakian: Students Saved Millions On Textbooks With New Company

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An agreement with Follett Higher Education Group saved Connecticut's community college students more than \$4 million in textbook costs during the last academic year compared to buying new textbooks, according to state officials.

Mark Ojakian, president of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities system, announced the first-year savings of the five-year agreement Tuesday.

"We heard directly from students how the cost of books inhibits their ability to complete their coursework," said Ojakian.

"These books can cost hundreds of dollars and frequently are only used for one semester. Our goal is to keep our institutions accessible and affordable so in this instance we negotiated as a system and got the best deal for our students."

Last year, CSCU reached the agreement with Follett to manage the 12 community college bookstores, which included a commitment from Follett to invest \$250,000 in campus bookstore upgrades.

The savings for students were reached partly through Follett's offer to match the price if students find a new or used textbook for a lesser amount with another

vendor such as Amazon or Barnes & Noble. In addition, students saved money by buying used books or renting them, and selling their textbooks back to the stores.

Follett also offered the students a 10 percent discount on new books and provided a \$250,000 scholarship fund.

According to a statement released by CSCU, Melissa Cote, a first-year student at Asnuntuck Community College said the discounts and price matching are "great" and added that the "10 percent discount made it an easier decision when it came to keeping or selling back. I think it gives you a better option of purchasing books here."

BLOOMFIELD HARDWARE STORE

Crash Into Building Caused By Iced Tea

By **STEVEN GOODE**
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BLOOMFIELD — A car crash into the front of the former Bloomfield Hardware Store on Sept. 19 appears to have been caused by a cold beverage.

According to Bloomfield police, Thomas McNeill of Avon was turning north onto Tunxis Avenue from Wintonbury Avenue when he began to choke after having finished a bottle of iced tea.

McNeill's 2017 Subaru Outback then struck the rear end of a green 2014 Honda Accord being driven by Carolyn O'Connell of Suffield and careened westward, jumping the curb and crashing through the hardware store's glass entrance.

According to the police report, McNeill

said he did not remember striking the vehicle or the building. His first recollection was someone telling him to get out of the car and having people help him do so.

Two witnesses, Craig Hunter and Roy Farrell, rushed to help McNeill out of the car when they noticed that a fire had started beneath it, according to the report.

The car suffered extensive crash and fire damage. The building also suffered extensive damage, according to the report.

The building's owner, Robert Schwartz, said Tuesday that the cost of the damage from water, the collision and the fire was not yet known, but added that he will have to move his real estate office located on the west side of the building until repairs are made.

Schwartz, who has been in the real

estate business for 30 years, said he has had other properties damaged by motorists who ran into storefronts, but never experienced a car catching on fire before.

On the bright side, Schwartz said, an original blue and gold Bloomfield Hardware sign was uncovered when contractors started to open up the building to inspect the damage, and he hopes to salvage it when demolition begins.

According to police, O'Neill needed assistance to walk and appeared disoriented.

O'Connell told police that she was not injured in the accident.

Police determined that the accident was caused by a medical problem and no enforcement action was taken, according to the report.