

MEMORANDUM

To: Bowdoinham Selectboard

From: Yvette Meunier, Director of Planning & Development

Date: April 8, 2026

Re: Acceptance of \$750,000 USDOT Rural and Tribal Assistance Grant – Merrymeeting Trail

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Selectboard vote to accept \$750,000 grant awarded to the Town of Bowdoinham through the U.S. Department of Transportation's Rural and Tribal Assistance (RTA) Pilot Program to advance planning and preliminary design and engineering for the Merrymeeting Trail. This grant does not require a local match.

Background

On April 6, 2026, the USDOT Build America Bureau announced awards through its Rural and Tribal Assistance (RTA) Pilot Program, selecting 49 projects nationwide out of 799 applications. Bowdoinham's Merrymeeting Trail project was among just 31 rural communities selected nationally and the only project in New England, reflecting the competitiveness and merit of the application.

The RTA Pilot Program supports rural communities by funding early-stage project development activities—such as planning, technical analysis, and preliminary engineering—that position projects for future construction funding. Unlike many federal transportation programs, this grant comes with no local match requirement, allowing the Town to advance the project with no direct fiscal impact on local taxpayers.

Project Scope

As initially proposed in the Town's 2025 application, the RTA grant will fund planning and preliminary design and engineering work for an approximately 8.5-mile segment of the Merrymeeting Trail, running from roughly 0.5 miles south of the Bowdoinham Riverfront Park at 83 River Road to 3 Tulip Street in Richmond.

Funded activities include:

- Surveying and base mapping
- Preliminary alignment development
- Drainage and culvert analysis
- Conceptual bridge and structural evaluations

- Roadway crossing design
- Segment-specific public engagement
- Advancement of this segment through Preliminary Design with engineered plans

Since the application was submitted, renewed coordination with Richmond and Gardiner has allowed discussion of a broader 19.7-mile regional trail corridor extending through Richmond to downtown Gardiner. While this expanded vision exceeds the scope of the current RTA grant, acceptance of these funds preserves progress on the southern segment while staff and regional partners continue pursuing additional funding opportunities to advance the remaining portions of the corridor.

Next Steps

Upon Selectboard acceptance, staff will execute the grant agreement and proceed with consultant coordination in accordance with USDOT requirements. Any future scope expansion or funding alignment will return to the Selectboard for review.

Proposed Motion

Move to accept the U.S. Department of Transportation Rural and Tribal Assistance Pilot Program grant in the amount of \$750,000 for planning and preliminary design of the Merrymeeting Trail, with no local match required, and authorize the Town Manager to execute all necessary grant documents on behalf of the Town.