

Notes from Public Meeting 3

Meeting held February 22, 2022
Westfield Multiuse Trail Connector

Meeting Participation & Route Opposition

At least 76 zoom sign-ins appeared during the meeting, but commenters often had more than one person in the room with them, so overall meeting participation is assumed to be over 80 people. Individuals who spoke were generally in opposition to the preferred route alignment, though most said they supported a trail in another location/configuration. One person mentioned that opposition via word of mouth is very high. Nick Morganelli, City Councilor in Ward 1, said he's never heard such an outcry. Twelve (12) people expressed in their comments opposition to the trail through neighborhood streets, and a few of those people expressed concern about use of Montgomery Street and N. Elm Street as well. A couple people did not speak at length but expressed opposition when one person stated that most are in support of the project.

Discussion Themes

Background to Project / Where We are in Process

- Columbia Greenway committee got involved in 2019 exploring how to extend north as part of the corridor from Northampton down to New Haven. This is an extremely valued trail/shared use path, which is used by those people who are allowed to use it, not just cyclists. The major gaps in this route are Southampton and Westfield north. That's why we all decided that we should take the time to look at the scope of this project and came up with three proposals. Route A was at the moment probably the best way to do it. For Kittredge Drive neighborhood, if they're not happy we're not going to do it anyway. We'll start looking at alternatives. If you can't do it one way, you find another.
- Mark Cressotti, City Engineer, stated that the value out of this effort is to figure out how to get from A to B and to pinpoint constraints. There are only 3 ways to cross route 90 so that has limited the routes being considered. The City is trying to connect sources of bike and pedestrian traffic to destinations.
- Matt Gamelli, an engineer with the City, reiterated that we are in a feasibility study phase and nowhere near to figuring out exactly what it would look like. Vetting ideas with neighborhood but nowhere near final decision.

Communications

- The comment was made that no one knew about this project and that the route was running through the neighborhood.
- Disappointment was also expressed via email that abutters were not informed.

Trail through Kittredge Dr/Barbara Street & Vote

- As stated in beginning of notes, the majority of people who spoke were opposed to the trail running through the neighborhood, though most also suggested they support trails in general.

- Mark Cressotti, City Engineer, stated that they are not going to pursue a trail through the neighborhood until at least 50% of the neighborhood support it. Mark also stated in a separate meeting that they are open to other proposals.
 - Meeting attendees were interested in more clarity on what the 50% support meant, if they would get a vote. Mark responded no vote would be held but that the conversation would continue and future opportunity would be provided to residents to comment on alternatives. The City will take a look at what can be done and how can we put funding resources in place to achieve some sort of an identified route. Every effort would be made to have an in-person meeting.
 - One person expressed that it sounded like a petition is needed, and Mark agreed they could pursue that.
 - Another person wanted to know if it's just people directly abutting the trail or anyone in the neighborhood who gets a say.
 - City responded it's the whole neighborhood not just direct abutters
 - Another individual asked who the point person would be going forward and when people will get to see alternate proposals.
 - Mark said he doesn't have an answer on alternatives as he's leaving, but the City will be looking for how to avoid Kittredge Dr neighborhood. Certainly will be doing outreach and discussing various proposals, and nothing's going to happen overnight.
- Mark also stated that it is not atypical for people to be concerned starting out. Western Ave had all the same concerns and reasoning (snow, people at my door). Now they're saying, what an enhancement to my neighborhood. People's opinions will change about the trail in years to come.
- Mark stated the City does not act as an ogre against neighborhood concerns.
 - » One commenter said Kittredge Drive has seen the City do that. Sewer line went down the street. Feel like we have no say and are just going to get told what's going to happen.

Concerns about Use of Kittredge Dr/Barbara Street

- Desire to know how many people might be going through neighborhood if trail built.
 - City responded that 1500 people a day were counted along the Columbia Greenway Rail Trail in the urban center when usage spiked during the pandemic.
 - Someone stated that sounds like a lot
- One commenter stated this is an old school family neighborhood with a lot of people who walk dogs, joggers. In reality we have a lot of cars that speed up and down this street. How fast people drive needs to be taken into consideration. Now gonna increase traffic with someone who's a true cyclist. How will that be addressed?
 - » Another commenter stated that bikes only go 10-15 mph and not super fast. A lot of what I heard are existing conditions, that people [bikes/cars] are going too fast. A couple options: keep the potholes, consider rumble strips.
- I live right at the peak of the hill. People would be coming through what would be my yard, constantly.
- Property values do go up for bike trail that is a separate trail with a tree buffer. Yes, as you ride by you're getting glimpses of people's homes. Those are the ones that come up with studies [vs trails directly on-street]. Want to reinforce that those are false analogies [to say property values will go up].
- The hill is being ignored. People will be flying downhill and flying across Sunset and they're going to get hit or to hit someone.

Crime

- One individual spoke about being robbed. Crime has increased in this area.
- Encountered someone Pilgrim/Plymouth. Siminy trail. Mention they've had their bike stolen, potted plants stolen.
- One commenter is concerned about her kids walking home from school and being alone at home for a short time with an active bike path. Would the school provide bussing?

Safety along Montgomery Street/at Intersections

- It's crazy to be going along Montgomery Street. A child was killed at Crown/Prospect/Montgomery intersection. There are a lot of dump trucks going through there.
 - » The Councilor also agrees with the commenter about the intersection being unsafe
 - » Toole Design responded to this comment saying that it's awful someone was killed and that one of the aims of our company's work is to redesign intersections to make them safer
- Nick Morganelli, City Councilor in Ward 1, expressed that bikes are vehicles, can be on the roadway, but families should not be mixed with traffic, especially Southampton Road. Not against rail trail but completely against rail trail being dumped onto a Main Road. Not sure what the people in Boston are thinking about.
- One commenter stated, I love the existing bike trail in Westfield. I grew up in Prospect Hill area and so am very familiar with Prospect Hill, Montgomery St, and have concerns about phases of the route. Look like it wants to connect up near New Corner in addition to Prospect Hill apartments. Montgomery is a narrow street as it is. A lot of traffic on route with high school, buses, and people driving out to nearby towns. Can't compare to Western Ave, which is a more rural setting. I know I'd be scared taking kids of bike trail along Montgomery Rd or DOT's wisdom with Southampton Rd. Particularly with winter.
- A student at Westfield State made responded to comments about people not wanting to use busy roads by stating that traffic calming will help make the roads safer.

N. Elm Street

- Two people expressed concern with shutting down a lane on N Elm
- Mark, in response to a comment, said you're right the City and Commonwealth spent considerable time investing in downtown but we'll be studying N Elm and what this means
 - » A lot of people further down at Orange Street said it's difficult to get out of there
 - » People speed in right hand land just to clear through so don't necessarily need the lane
- In terms of getting to Women's Temperance – whole reason we got a second bridge [was to expand capacity] – so taking a lane not a great idea. Steep hill would really need a Memorial Drive (Cambridge) type bridge for trail users.
- One commenter, a student at Westfield State, said we don't need 3 lanes of southbound traffic when rightmost lane goes to Orange St and people just cut in at last second. Will create both a bike lane and a traffic calming measure by taking away a lane.

Southampton Road / Route 10/202

- Mark stated that the State had wanted to just do pavement improvements along Southampton Road, but the City pointed out what happens on that road operationally with left turns, and now MassDOT is incorporating a multiuse trail.
- City stated that Western Ave shared us path works with many crossings, has just as many breaks and driveways.
 - » Another individual said Western Ave was not comparable as it's more rural

Rail Trail/Pioneer Valley Railroad

- One person commented that you've got to get Pioneer Valley Railroad to work with you and widen their space. That's the only feasible route north. Doesn't make sense when existing rail is what rail trail is for. Doesn't make sense to go through back yards.
- Another commenter stated that are also in support of the rail route.
- City responded they have no temperament to be in an adverse position with Pioneer Valley Railroad. If PVRR is not for using their space, we're going to have to find another way to [route a trail].

Snow Maintenance

- When asked what's the plan for snow removal, City responded generally we don't clear snow on off-road paths. If it's on-road adjacent, the policy is that we clear it like a sidewalk.
- Commenter asks that extra consideration be given to where snow will be put with increased snowstorms

Parking

- Is there any thought about people using the parking area near Southampton road elementary school?
 - » Mark: Needs further thought. Whatever we do will need to be in compliance with schools

Alternatives Proposed by Attendees

- At least two commenters reiterated the railroad route as the best route
- A few people stated they are not against the trail but would like to see other options.
- Stay on Arm Brook reservoir and do not come over a levy. Come up on back side. Will have to do some work in the woods. Come up on Servistar Road. A gentlemen mentioned that was swampland. It's not swampland. Very rutted. Come up on Servistar and connect with Southampton Rd.
 - » Another commenter agreed about going around the reservoir. The trail can be headed toward soccer field at middle school. Would be in all woods and avoid traffic. Wouldn't affect the neighborhood. Kids used running path all the time.
- Mark stated there's merit in some of the alternatives so will look at those.

Connectivity/Regional Connection

- One commenter stated he was coming in with the 10,000 foot view. Westfield is one of the big challenges. What's really important is connectivity. Where do you want to go? If it goes through Kittredge or not I think it's irrelevant. I do wonder a little bit about going up Lockhouse Rd. Also wonder about interchange and coming out on Barnes Street. From perspective it's how we route the major distance. Half the time I'm on East Mountain Rd. We've heard a lot about Kittredge. When I look at this I'm

concerned about Montgomery and trying to put trail on west side. Will impact street trees. In terms of Elm Street it's only 300 feet. If I had to hop off and walk I'd do that. What's most expensive part, it's the switchback. What do we do to create a complete route and how do we make parts better. If we use state route for now and later if Kittredge Dr wants to connect we can do that. Thinks Route 10 should have separated bike lanes and not a path. How do we create connectivity that doesn't just charge through neighborhoods that we're not ready for now?

- Member of the Manhan Rail Trail committee stated that he understands all the work that went into this option. One thing that we were doing now that our trail is in place already is to try to do connectors to schools. [Route A] option is good in that it connects the schools. Southampton bike trail is already on the DOT projects list. Pullman Rd to Sheldon's Ice Cream on 10. This trail is critical trail as it's one of only two gaps in entire trail to Northampton to New Haven. Did any other options bring trail closer to Southampton connector?
 - » Mark responded that all alternatives went from point A to point B
 - » So, commenter recognized there are still a few miles in the grand scheme
 - » Mark stated that the Commonwealth is designing project along route 10 from I-90 to North Rd. Still will be a gap. That's state highway. So anticipation is that the state will complete that gap.
- Rail route coming out to route 10 at Sheldon's is worst part. Current ride end to Hampton Ponds area is nice and calm with County Rd and extension in East Park. East Mtn road south of 202 is very fast and scary. State working on side of 202 along airport. A lot of shoulder space to work with. If eastern trail is out of the way in the woods and not accessible, it creates a 3-season trail that's not usable in the winter. Would love to see full rail route someday. Real challenge is Women's Temperance now to Route 202. Covering gap is important.

Miscellaneous

- As a board member of the Friends of Columbia Greenway Rail Trail, would love to not see the onus on the Friends group to do education for this project and for the City to take on more of that.
- One person stated that he is concerned this isn't the time for this project with the budget crisis
- One commenter mentioned the trail will become a potential escape route for people on dirt bikes
- When asked whether there are plans to have lighting, Mark responded that's to be determined.
- From Councilor Morganelli: really have to consider phases, where does it go and how does that happen? People like the idea of the bike trail just concerned about the neighborhood

Closing Statements

- Mark thanked everyone. Your information is valuable and thank you for expressing obstacles we need to work better to avoid. We will pick the most challenging issues like crossing I-90 and see what can be achieved. There will be more opportunity for everyone to speak again.
- Toole Design expressed a thank you, including for ideas you brought. We recorded your concerns and will be including those in the report so they are carried forward to next phases.