

NORTH ADAMS VISION 2030: PARKS, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE WORKSHOP SUMMARY

February 28, 2013

OVERVIEW

The North Adams Parks, Recreation and Open Space workshop for the city's comprehensive plan, *North Adams Vision 2030*, was structured as a two-hour interactive open house event. Eight "Stations" with posters displaying data, inventories, maps and future recreation amenities were set up in Gallery 49 on Main Street

Primary comprehensive plan stations (station objectives described in detail later):

1. DRAFT Goals, Policies and Actions
2. Future Shared Use Paths – Ashuwillticook and Mohawk
3. Trails – Improving Direct Access
4. Current Recreation Facilities
5. New Recreation Facilities

There were also stations with information about current initiatives related to open space and recreation:

6. Downtown Flood Control Chute Improvement Options (Hoosic River Revival)
7. Skate Park Site Feasibility Study (BRPC)
8. Urban Walking Route (nbCC's Mass in Motion)

ATTENDANCE

30 residents signed the attendance sheet, but estimates of actual attendees are closer to 45-50, as not everyone signed in. Mayor Alcombright, three City Councilors, and some representatives from city boards and commissions were some of those in attendance. The meeting was organized and facilitated by Berkshire Regional Planning Commission staff, Amy Kacala, Project Manager and Senior Planner, and Mackenzie Greer, Community Planner.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN STATIONS

Each station displayed a poster or series of posters with descriptive information (text, maps or images), and asked for input from attendees, who wrote on post-it notes or directly on the posters. Some of the stations included the opportunity to rank preferences for ideas suggested. BRPC staff, the Mayor, Judy Grinnell, a Steering Committee Member and Chairperson of the Hoosic River Revival, and Amanda Chilson, a Steering Committee Member and Mass in Motion Project Coordinator were available at the stations to answer questions and encourage comments.

STATION 1: DRAFT GOALS, POLICIES AND ACTIONS

Goals, policies and action steps related to Parks, Recreation and Open Space have been drafted based on input from residents and businesses, community stakeholders, past planning efforts, and inventory analysis

were on display for public review and comment. Post-it notes were provided for comments, and attendees placed them directly onto the posters in space provided. The verbatim comments received are incorporated into posters provided as a separate document. Each person was given three “dots” to assign their top priorities for the policies or individual actions. The priority dots were well distributed among the goals, policies and actions. The highest scoring priority policy was “promote healthy active living within the community” which included actions such as establishing a network of walking routes and trails, and instituting a Mayor’s Fitness Challenge.

STATION 2: FUTURE SHARED USE PATHS – ASHUWILLTICOOK AND MOHAWK

Maps of each were provided displaying the area of the two paths.

Mohawk Shared Use Path: The Mohawk route displayed the east-west connections between the City of North Adams and the Town of Williamstown. It showed a draft preferred route, as defined through a prior planning effort, as well as some of the alternative routes that have been identified for consideration. The poster asked for opinions on which routes would work best, places to have neighborhood connections, and areas where amenities such as lighting, benches, river access, and signs may be important.

There were a few themes among the comments received. There were safety and aesthetic concerns expressed about the trail running along the Curran Highway, and comments advocating for the connection of existing activity hubs such as Noel Field and Heritage State Park.

Ashuwillticook Rail Trail Extension: The Ashuwillticook poster displayed a potential route of the future trail extension between Lime Street on the Adams/North Adams border to downtown North Adams.

The comments made offered site-specific ideas as well as connection alternatives. It was suggested that use of and connection to the schools be considered.

Note: The specific comments about each trail section have been added to the posters and are available on the project webpage. These comments will be used in the course of planning these routes in the future, as well as other development activities which may take place along the route.

STATION 3: TRAILS – IMPROVING DIRECT ACCESS

A framework map displaying trails, major recreational areas, and open space was provided for viewing. Comments were gathered by post-its, direct notation on the map, and notes of agreement by subsequent viewers. The most popular comments focused on improving and expanding trail systems at Windsor Lake, continuing the Mahican-Mohawk Trail into North Adams, as well as providing better points of access through parking or and signage (ex. At the Cascades). Site specific recommendations included developing a riverside trail next to McCann Tech, and improving access to the Hoosic River berms on the east side of Noel Field.

Note: The specific comments have been added to the posters and are available on the project webpage.

STATION 4: CURRENT RECREATION FACILITIES

Current recreation facilities in the City were divided into five categories (see list with comment themes, below). The posters were formatted with a list of the facilities and a picture of each. Participants were asked to note what they like about each, and what they’d like to see in the future. The specific comments about each facility are provided as part of the posters on the city website. Below are some of the common themes of the comments.

Athletic and Community Facilities: Three facilities were listed – Alcombright Athletic Complex, Noel Field Athletic Complex and the Windsor Lake Area.

There were no comments made about the Alcombright Complex. The variety of activities at Noel Field, and the facility overall is greatly appreciated. There were comments about intensifying the uses, and taking advantage of surrounding options, such as using the berm along the Hoosic River as a walking route.

Neighborhood Parks: Nine neighborhood parks and playgrounds were listed – Johnson School Playground, Kemp Park, Greylock School Playground, West End Apartments Play Area, Beaver Street Playground, Blackinton Playground, Brayton Field, Freeman Playground, and the Houghton Street Park.

Overall, there were fewer comments and praise for facilities in this category. A few, such as the Houghton Street Playground and the Johnson Street School Playground, are well-appreciated. It was noted that the Beaver Street Playground is ugly and unknown to some, there is a need for a small park in the Cliff Street area, and specific additional park uses were noted for other parks.

Historic Park Facilities: Western Gateway Heritage State Park and Natural Bridge State Park were included in this category. There were a few positive comments about each, but most of the comments promoted improved physical access and marketing of the sites, and modernizing both facilities. It was noted that the attractions at Western Gateway Heritage State Park are very limited.

Natural Parks and Facilities: Such facilities listed were the Cascades, Mt. Greylock State Park, Mount Williams Reservoir, Notch Reservoir, and the Hoosic River. There were many comments in appreciation of all the natural sites North Adams has to offer. The improvement comments were primarily about litter pickup, offering dog refuse bags, and improving marketing and access.

Pocket Parks: A series of pocket (very small) parks was listed – Colgrove Park, the Elderly Housing Recreation Area, Senior Center Park, Veteran’s Park, Monitor Park and the Downtown Pocket Parks. Comments about the senior facilities were very minimal; greater input here is needed. There were far more comments about the two new downtown pocket parks on Eagle and Main Streets, as well as Veteran’s and Colgrove Park which are also located in the downtown. There is appreciation for these spaces, and a desire for more of them. Specific comments about Colgrove suggested it be used as a town commons or more active downtown park, with four “votes” of support.

STATION 5: NEW RECREATION FACILITIES

Another poster asked for input on what types of new facilities are desired, and where they should be located. Many of the locations noted were in downtown North Adams. A town common, pavilion or music shed, more community gardens (flower and food), and a dog park were popular ideas. There was also a need noted for walking and bicycle tracks or routes, and also bike lanes.

STATION 6: DOWNTOWN FLOOD CONTROL CHUTE IMPROVEMENT OPTIONS (HOOSIC RIVER REVIVAL)

The Hoosic River Revival (HRR) President, Judy Grinnell, displayed a series of conceptual drawings for improvements around the flood control chutes which contain the Hoosic River as it runs through the downtown area of North Adams. There was particular interest in two of the drawings displayed, one drawing of the Noel Field area and the other of Heritage Park/City Hall/ Marshall Street. People asked such questions as: What is the timetable? Who will be paying for this? What will the chutes look like? Will we still have flood protection? How do I find out about the other drawings? Judy Grinnell provided information for those interested. The HRR has adopted the same flood protection criteria as the Corps of Engineers (for the 500-year flood). There will not be a shovel in the ground for any project until the HRR Board of Directors consults with city officials, and receives permits from state and federal agencies, as well as the Corps of Engineers. The funding will be from private individuals, businesses, state and federal grants. Most importantly, residents will be able to review the drawings online by mid-April on the HRR website (www.hoosicriverrevival.org) and will have opportunity to discuss the concepts with the project consultants a second Community Conversation, June 15 from 9am-1pm at the St. Elizabeth's of Hungary Church.

STATION 7: SKATE PARK SITE FEASIBILITY STUDY (BRPC)

A skateboard and BMX park is being considered by the City in response to a youth group request two years ago, and the indication that there aren't enough recreation facilities for teenagers. A first step in the process of developing such a park is to determine the best possible site. A poster was displayed with information on five candidate locations – Noel Field, Houghton Street Park, Holden Street parking lot (behind Big Y), the area of Avon and Alton Streets and Kemp Park. Attendees were asked to review the site information, including pro's and con's, and fill out a form with their own comments and suggestions about what sites are appropriate.

The response about a skateboard and BMX park was very positive. A greater number of respondents suggested Noel Field as an ideal location, while preferences for the other four sites were fairly evenly spread out.

STATION 8: URBAN WALKING ROUTE (NBCC'S MASS IN MOTION)

The nbCC's Mass in Motion program is working to establish an urban walking route in North Adams. This will be a route that is safe and convenient to walk with benefits such as posted distances, calories burned, etc. A poster was displayed showing the potential routes, which center around downtown. Feedback about the routes was solicited from attendees. The comments provided some specific feedback, such as marking the loops with kilometers and miles, incorporating the berms along the Hoosic River, and to look at Pittsfield's downtown walking loop as an example.

NEXT STEPS

The notes from this workshop are being compiled and summarized for posting on the city website in order to allow more residents to view and provide comments. The draft goals will be updated and also posted.