



Willard's Woods

Meeting Notes

Listening Session

June 14, 2022

Design and Engineering for Universally Accessible Trails and Parking Accommodations

Project Team in attendance

- Amber Carr, Conservation Coordinator, Town of Lexington, acarr@lexingtonma.gov or 781-698-4505
- Kyle Zick, Principal, Kyle Zick Landscape Architecture
- Tracy Hudak, Project Landscape Architect, Kyle Zick Landscape Architecture

The first public listening session for Willard's Woods Universally Accessible Trails and Parking Accommodations was held on June 14, 2022 at 7pm, through a Zoom virtual webinar format. Below is a summary of the presentation and the issues discussed:

1. Amber Carr introduced the project team, and explained the format for the presentation.
2. Kyle Zick described the project site's location within the Town of Lexington, highlighting the rich variety of natural communities present on the site and the diverse users of the conservation property. Kyle also laid out the overall project scope.
The scope for this project is limited to developing designs for a universally accessible trail or trails within Willard's Woods, and any related new parking areas or parking area improvements. Along with the trail(s), KZLA will examine opportunities for site furnishings, kiosk upgrades, and invasive species management along the chosen trail route. KZLA will also produce cost estimates to enable Conservation staff to seek funding sources for any improvements. Funding for construction has not yet been secured. The project scope also includes delineating the wetlands on the property, and completing a full land survey of the entire property to assist with any future work in the Conservation Area. While related, meadow management is a separate on-going project that is not directly covered in this effort.
3. Any policy decisions will ultimately be made by the Conservation Commission, who manages the property.
4. The principles and goals of Universal Access were discussed. The goal is to remove barriers for all people, to make the environment accessible, understood, and usable by as many people as possible. Universal accessibility means meeting applicable Americans with Disabilities Act and Massachusetts Architectural Access Board regulations, at a minimum.
For Willard's Woods, universal accessibility will also include:
 - Providing access to diverse ecologies on the site
 - Considering differences in physical, auditory and visual abilities
 - Facilitating multi-modal circulation
 - Enabling four-season access, to the extent possible, and
 - Multilingual access for signage



5. Kyle laid out the draft project schedule. KZLA and the team of subconsultants began work assessing and documenting the project site in May. This work will continue for several more weeks. This listening session was the first step in the design proposal process, which will have a number of opportunities for public comment. Ultimately, the schedule concludes with a final design presentation to the Conservation Commission in October 2022, where a vote on the design proposal is expected.
6. A previous planning effort identified potential universally accessible trail loops nearest the North Street entrance. That same study identified a potential extension of the universally accessible trail system out to the Brent Road entrance. Tracy of KZLA, walked attendees through slides of the project site, examining the different areas encountered along these potential trail routes to obtain feedback from attendees on their concerns, ideas, and priorities. Comments are grouped by area:
 - a. North Street Entrance
 - The parking area can be over-full when there are scout camping activities going on in Willard's Woods. The lot can also be full on weekends.
 - Several participants felt that on an average weekday, the parking at the North Street lot seems adequate.
 - b. Trailhead/Trail Near North Road
 - One meeting participants noted that the trash receptacle at this location is heavily used by people to dispose of dog waste.
 - Amber noted that the seasonal crew of Conservation workers has replaced the dog rules sign at the trailhead.
 - c. Firepits/Camping Area
 - Meeting participants noted that the firepits are used by the scouts, but that other people also use these areas.
 - One attendee also noted the potential for the accessible trail to utilize the area that is north-northwest of the firepits for a loop trail.
 - d. Wet Meadow
 - Meeting attendees report that the meadow can get quite wet. The trail that leads down and to the right from the firepits was a Scout project several years ago to raise the trail above any standing water.
 - Several participants noted that they would like any trail surfacing in this area studied to ensure that the sensitive environment is protected.
 - Amber reported that mowing in the meadows currently occurs only at the end of the fall, but that the Ecological Land Management Plan suggest mowing in June as well.
 - Participants also noted the potential presence of coyotes and deer at the meadow's edge.
 - e. Meadow Trails
 - The stream crossing that is off to the west-northwest of the picnic tables was identified by one participant as a nice location to include on a universal access trail.

- Regarding the cedar trees within the meadow, a participant reported that previous local residents noted their importance as a snow break.

f. Mill Pond

- Participants generally agreed that the pond makes an attractive location to include on a universally accessible trail. The history of the area was also noted as being a feature that could be explored.
- Participants were divided on whether the pond should be fenced, if a universal access trail was placed around the pond. Many felt the fence was necessary to keep dogs from getting into the pond, and to protect the integrity of the banks. However, there was also concern that the fence ruined the picturesque nature of the pond.
- The potential to have the pond designated as a leashed dog area was explored. Some participants reported that many people do not follow the posted dog rules now, and will likely not follow those rules in this area either.
- It was mentioned that the investment in the daylighting project at the pond, and any future investment in a universally accessible trail, needs to have sufficient maintenance resources available to maintain the improvements, or the money is wasted. The stream banks on either side of the bridge are experiencing erosion from peoples/dogs not staying on the trail.
- One participant questioned whether the need for a fence is indicative of too many people visiting the site.
- A participant questioned whether there could be accessible parking on North Road, just north of the pond, as there was in the past. Amber noted that sightline concerns on North Road create difficulties in making a parking area in that location, and that was why that area was phased out.

g. Bike Path Near Pond

- Participants felt strongly that the stone walls of the former cart path were important, both aesthetically and historically, and should remain. Participants also expressed support for a trail surface that was not asphalt, and preferred a trail surface that was more natural, and sensitive to the ecology and history.
- A previous Eagle Scout project tried to establish a stonedust trail area elsewhere in Willard's Woods, and the stonedust washed away, leading to concerns about use of that material.

h. Bike Path

- Meeting attendees noted that a section of the path is quite rocky.
- One participant inquired about whether a new trail could cut from the meadows to the bike path while avoiding the rocky area. This would also shorten the universal access trail extension route.

i. Bike Path Approaching Brent Road

- Participants noted that the trail here can get quite slippery through the heavily-treed areas, particularly in winter with ice build-up.

- There was also concern about whether the volume or type of traffic was compromising tree roots and endangering the health of the trees/tree roots.
- Also on the topic of traffic, It was pointed out that dogs are often off-leash at all times of the day/week in the open meadow area nearest to Brent Road. A participant questioned whether the volume and nature of the activity in that area ran counter to the conservation goals for the property.

j. Brent Road Entrance

- The trash receptacle at this location is also well-used and emptied by DPW, but Amber pointed out that generally, conservation areas abide by 'Leave No Trace' in Lexington.
- Per direction from the Conservation Commission, Amber specifically asked for feedback on parking along Brent Road, developing a parking area that included only spaces for ADA parking, and the option of developing a larger parking lot that incorporated ADA and non-ADA spaces.
- There was extensive conversation on this topic, with some viewpoints shifting as attendees provided additional ideas.
- In general, attendees noted the busy nature of Brent Road, particularly in the mornings and afternoons/late afternoons, with dog walkers, school buses and parents taking their children to school. While a large volume of cars was reported to be parking along the road, attendees did not indicate that they ever had trouble finding a place to park. They did note the presence of professional dog-walkers using this entrance.
- Participants expressed concern about clear-cutting large swathes of trees at this entrance and were concerned that expanding a paved area with the universal access trail would set a precedent they did not support. Amber noted that universal access trails do not mean that the parking areas need to be paved in asphalt, and that the trails themselves also do not need to be paved. She also noted that the Open Space and Recreation Plan evaluated all open spaces in Lexington for whether they might be a good candidate for a universally accessible trail. Willard's Woods was one of the conservation areas that met the criteria.
- While some attendees expressed support for a small parking lot for those who needed accessible parking spaces, others were concerned that even a small number of ADA spaces would draw more people to the Brent Road Entrance, or that people would park illegally in the ADA spaces. Amber noted that the idea of handicapped spaces along the road are being explored, but simply painting a parallel parking space as an ADA space does not meet the ADA requirements. Amber also noted that if an ADA parking space-only lot was the selected option, trail maps would indicate that only accessible parking was available at that location.
- Teenagers enter at the Brent Road location in the evenings now, and there was concern that a developed parking area in that location might draw additional people.
- Participants raised the question of whether an accessible parking area could be developed on Hathaway Road rather than along Brent Road. Participants cited the fact that it is a dead-end street, and poses less risk to people who may have trouble navigating agilely.



- Another participant suggested that entrances from side streets should not be made into attractions.
7. Kyle and Amber then requested general feedback on the project, including priorities, concerns, and opportunities.
 - a. The issue of user conflicts was raised, highlighting the difficulty in providing access for dogs, cyclists and a universal trail all at one time. One participant noted that off-leash dogs and a UA trail requires UA trail users to ‘run a gauntlet’ given the size of some dogs. On a related note, meeting participants also noted that they felt some user groups had been driven out – for example, younger children, and people with small dogs, which they believe is because of the intimidating aspect of large dogs being off-leash. One participant suggested studying how the nature of visitor traffic would change with different trail changes, and inquired about universal access data for other sites.
 - b. The importance of minimizing historic and environmental impacts was raised throughout the presentation.
 - c. Meeting attendees inquired about whether a series of small loops might be more useful than one long extended universal access trail.
 8. Kyle and Amber discussed the next steps.
 - a. The presentation, meeting notes, and projects updates will be posted on the project website: https://www.lexingtonma.gov/conservation/land-stewardship/pages/current-conservation-projects#anchor_planning
 - b. Comments on the presented materials or on the project in general, should be sent to Amber Carr by July 14, 2022. You may also contact Amber to conduct a site walk to address your ideas or concerns. Email: acarr@lexingtonma.gov or Phone: 781-698-4505
 - c. The initial presentation of the design proposal to the Conservation Commission is tentatively set for July 2022.
 - d. A second public charette will be held in early fall.