

Public Workshop Minutes
Walden Woods Project – Public Workshop
October 21, 2006, 2-5 pm
Concord-Carlisle High School, Concord, Massachusetts

Agenda

This first public workshop focused on introducing the project and identifying issues and opportunities for the study to address.

2:15-2:30 Meeting Introduction

2:30-3:15 Break out into discussion teams

3:15-4:30 Team presentations of critical concerns, overall group discussion of location criteria and overall responses to the project

Introduction and Project Background Presented by Jack Ahern, UMass

Wildlife Biology presentation by Paige Warren, UMass

Cultural Significance presentation by Ethan Carr, UMass

Meeting mediation by John Mullin, UMass

Meeting called to order at 2:15 pm by Jack Ahern

Project Background and Goals

Jack Ahern introduced the project background. In 2004, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) awarded a Transportation, Community and System Preservation Program (TCSP) grant to fund a feasibility study of a highway overpass for pedestrians and wildlife crossing Route 2 in Concord, Massachusetts. The feasibility study, initially proposed by the Walden Woods Project, is now managed by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), the Regional Planning Council for the Boston Metropolitan region. The MAPC has contracted with an interdisciplinary team from UMass Amherst to examine the feasibility of establishing a wildlife and recreation overpass within a defined study area from Crosby's Corner to the Sudbury River, centered on State Route 2 in Concord MA.

Project goals: To explore and analyze the feasibility of establishing a combined wildlife and pedestrian crossing of Mass. State Route 2 in Concord, MA.

The study will examine the proposed crossing from neighborhood to national perspectives and consider associated benefits and impacts on:

transportation

wildlife movement

Community/neighborhood issues, concerns and opportunities

recreational use

the economy of the host communities and the region

In summary, there are multiple perspectives that will be considered on this project:

wildlife, vehicular and pedestrian safety, community issues, and access and aesthetics.

Dr. Paige Warren, a Research Professor of Wildlife Biology at UMass, presented the importance of connectivity for wildlife. She discussed the importance of wildlife corridors for movement and the types of animals and reptiles that can be expected to be present in the study area.

Dr. Ethan Carr, a Cultural Landscape Professor at UMass, presented the importance of this study as it pertains to the Cultural Landscape of Concrpd and the larger metropolitan region. He presented the significant cultural sites located in and around the study area.

Team Discussions: Critical Criteria to be Addressed

Attendees were formed into four teams. Each team was asked to list out all the critical criteria that should be addressed with this study. Following a 20 minute discussion, each team was asked to choose their top three criteria. One representative from each team presented the top three criteria to the entire room. Based upon the top three criteria from each team, the priority issues to be addressed in the study are:

- an opportunity to showcase an innovative approach to crossing design;
- an important educational opportunity;
- potential local economic benefits
- Compatibility of Wildlife and Pedestrian Crossing—is this feasible?
- Cost/benefit analysis—Trade offs. Why this is needed—impact on other existing highway projects?
- Where are people and animals currently moving ? —scale, location and distribution
- Connection to existing trails and railway
- Community factors (needs, concerns, etc.)

*The UMass team will take these priorities into consideration, as well as all other criteria presented but not listed herein, for the scope of the feasibility study.

Group Discussion - Location

Following team presentations, all attendees were asked to provide some location priorities and criteria for determining alternative locations for the passage structure. The major points are listed below:

Location priorities

- Brister's Hill/Town Forest/Landfill (suitable to meet needs for both pedestrians and wildlife)
- At highest existing land in the study area
- Use the Existing railroad track underpass
- Avoid wetlands
- Avoid intersections
- T station as access point

Criteria

- Consider the project in Landscape context
- Local and regional context
- Human comfort
- Parking
- Safety of access points
- Sensitivity to existing residents in relation to human use
- Open space connectivity
- Connections form town center to town center
- Inconvenient to Walden Pond
- Existing trails

- Desire lines (look at different users – cultural, recreational, etc.)
- Compatibility of uses for humans and wildlife
- Wildlife needs (which species) where are they trying and failing to cross?
- New active recreation placement (CCHS playing fields)
- Cost
- Structural
- Minimize takings, private ownership
- Times of Use (for pedestrians and wildlife)

Open Discussion

During the open floor discussion, the following concerns were raised:

Members of the Mass. Department of Conservation and Recreation were present at the meeting. They voiced concerns over the management of the new passage and accessibility. There is a concern over the passage increasing visitation to the Walden Woods State Reservation and Walden Pond and whether the existing DCR management plan will be consulted and considered in the location determination as well as the design process. The DCR notified the UMass staff that there are significant limits to expandability.

Local residents also asked the team to consider the timeliness of the project, and the changing political climate and population shifts in the town. In addition, there could be a shift in attitude towards wildlife movement. Progress is very important for the success of this project.

The majority of participants recognized the significance of this project as precedent-setting.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of the meeting, meeting attendees were asked to present one thing they think UMass should do in this study:

- Know about what is happening at Crosby's Corner
- Be commended
- Focus on Wildlife
- How will it benefit local people (present and future)?
- Work closely with stakeholders
- Contact land managers about wildlife issues
- Be aware of 126 rerouting
- 1 species = 1 vote
- Make it stunningly beautiful
- Think of culture and ecology
- Think of reality not the hypothetical
- Not solve one problem by creating another
- Think of connectivity of corridors
- Solve wildlife problems
- See as interesting opportunity
- Don't screw it up
- Address human use and impacts on wildlife

- Look at impact of larger area
- Look at impact of area around it
- Don't be afraid to say it won't work.
- Look at Thoreau Amble
- Get better wildlife data
- Think of interactions in all other contexts to determine how it works
- Map all proposed and existing trails.
- Not exacerbate problems at Walden Woods
- Consider areas that don't have as many variables
- Simplify

Next Steps

UMass will take public comments into consideration and integrate with the project outline/plan. A draft report will be submitted to the Advisory Board for review in late November. At the next Public Workshop to be held in January, UMass will be presenting to the public the research findings as well as location alternatives and design ideas.

Next Public Workshop Meeting: Saturday, January 27, 2007, time and place TBA (snow date is Saturday February 3, 2007)

Please visit the project website for updates:

www.umass.edu/waldenpassage

Attendees:

Public: Dan Stimson, Steve Winter, Elissa Brown, Carol Dwyer, Cheri Geckler, Lydia Rogers, Harry Beter, Barbara Lynn Davis, Lois Siegelman, Maureen O'Connell, Barbara Peskin, Henry Morr (sp?), Dinah Rowbotham, Susan Frey, Libby Herland, Tessa Hedleywhy (sp?), Wendy Ingram, Joan Ferguson, Ken Bassett, Denise Morrissey, Peter Hoffman

Project Advisory Board Members Present: Nancy Nelson, Matt Burne, Dinny McIntyre, Buzz Constable

UMass attendees: Jack Ahern, Ethan Carr, Beth Fenstermacher, Lee Jennings, Zenia Kotval, John Mullin and Paige Warren

Meeting Minutes by Beth Fenstermacher and Lee Jennings, UMass