

Community Health and Wellness: A Plan to Improve the North Adams Trail System

Clients: Mackenzie Greer, City Planner and Amanda Chilson, Mass in Motion



From Left: Mackenzie Greer, Molly Prindle, Caroline Bruno, Tom Murphy, Amanda Chilson

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Professor Sarah Gardner
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A Planning Project by: Caroline Bruno, Molly Prindle, Tom Murphy

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Project Goals

This project involves the analysis of current North Adams' trails, and the subsequent creation of a trail study and map. Through a comprehensive trail study, we will examine walking/hiking trails under municipal ownership and management in the North Adams area. Ultimately, we hope to provide suggestions to increase connectivity of the current trail networks and increase the usage of these trails. By gathering information regarding length, difficulty, and uses of trails, as well as amenities accessible to hikers, we plan to create a basic promotional trail map or brochure for the public.

As a collaborative partnership between the North Adams Office of Community Development and the Northern Berkshire Mass in Motion, this project is part of the larger development planned in the North Adams Vision 2030. Vision 2030 is an innovative project focusing on trail studies, the creation of a bike path, and other community oriented goals in order to engage the community and promote more community wide cohesion. Engaging with a wide range of community members and improving access to outdoor recreation to benefit the physical health of North Adams are indirect goals for this trail assessment project.

North Adams owns and operates municipal trails that can be accessed from downtown, but local knowledge about them varies and promotional material about outdoor recreation lacks accessible information. The main goal of this project is to improve the visibility of existing trails to increase usership to a wider variety of residents and nonresident visitors to North Adams. North Adams is already a destination for art in the Berkshires, but there is opportunity to tap into recreational tourism to increase economic activity for North Adams. Promoting these already existing trails as destinations will contribute to North Adams' growth and improvements over the next few years.

Creating a healthier community by increasing accessibility to outdoor recreation is an integral part of the vision to improve North Adams. The trails that exist provide opportunity for

healthy activities, but in order to encourage walkers and hikers of all ability levels, it is necessary to improve signage and awareness. A major part of this is to indicate clearly the difficulty, uses, and length of trails so that a visitor knows what to expect when beginning to walk. In addition, mapping out how these municipal trail systems can connect to trails owned and operated by other organizations will create a larger recreational network of trails to increase trail usage and connection to points of interest in the greater North Adams area.

Community Profile and Project Importance

Obesity has become an increasingly severe problem in the United States of America and yet it is an epidemic that is entirely preventable. Based on a study from September 2012, 23% of Massachusetts residents are considered obese with a BMI over 30¹. At a more local level, in Berkshire County, 22.5% of the population is obese². Childhood obesity in residents aged 2-19 is also strikingly high in Massachusetts at 14.3%. Obesity can lead to health risks such as heart disease, stroke, Type II Diabetes, and certain types of cancer³. In addition to the high obesity rates, a study in September 2012 researched the physical activity habits of communities in Massachusetts. This study showed that 20.9% of the adult population and 20.3% of the adolescent population in Massachusetts had not participated in any physical activity in the previous 7 days. While 30.4% watch 3 or more hours of television on a typical school day⁴. This is a startling finding that can be combated in part by investing more in community health initiatives, as well as increased accessibility to outdoor recreation opportunities.

In North Adams, more resources and attention have recently been set aside to improve access to areas for physical activity, showing commitment to creating a healthier community. Since becoming a Mass in Motion community, the city has dedicated itself to projects such as

¹ CDC 2012

² City Data 2013

³ CDC 2012

⁴ CDC 2012

this North Adams trail assessment in order to enhance access to local trails, by gaining information about their location, walkability, and necessary improvements. According to the CDC's Community Guide, there is strong evidence suggesting that increased access to areas for physical activity and community outreach is effective in increasing physical activity⁵. Mass in Motion is one of many community health initiatives in the state of Massachusetts that makes, "wellness initiatives a priority at the community level"⁶.

Increasing access and community engagement with walkable trails not only acts as a viable strategy for reducing the obesity rates in North Adams, but it also provides the community better access to nature. Natural settings are known to have psychological and health benefits for humans of all ages. For example, a national study completed in 2004 showed that outdoor activity in green spaces appears to reduce ADHD in young children⁷, and improve critical thinking⁸. Immersing oneself in nature also "promotes well-being and recovery from stress"⁹. With community initiatives such as the North Adams trail assessment, with the help of Mass in Motion and the city's planning office, promoting increased physical activity in greenspaces, our community can make vast strides in health, happiness, and overall well-being.

Project Background

One of the clients for this study, *Mass in Motion*, is a government initiative that works with communities across the Commonwealth to promote healthy lifestyles. Mass in Motion focuses on a variety of strategies to encourage people to eat healthier and become more active, leading to an overall healthier lifestyle. Mass in Motion focuses its efforts on affecting change at the policy level and also promotes behavioral change in communities. Our client Amanda

⁵ CDC 2011

⁶ CDC 2011

⁷ Kuo 2014

⁸ Ernst 2004

⁹ Hansman 2007

Chilson is a project manager for Mass in Motion and works in North Adams under Northern Berkshire Community Coalition.

In addition to the initiatives led by the Northern Berkshire Mass in Motion, this North Adams trail assessment project is also part of the larger North Adams' Vision 2030 Plan. This plan envisions an ideal North Adams through comprehensive development plans and outlines the goals, policies, and actions to get there. It allows for community members to engage more with both North Adams' downtown and particular points of interest. Related examples of Vision 2030 projects include a major bike path network, the development of the Greylock Market, and improvements to town parks and trail networks.

Currently, North Adams is anchored by a number of popular businesses and attractions. According to the Vision 2030 map, MASS MoCA, North Adams Public Library, the north side of Main Street, City Hall, and the Porches Inn are all thriving attractions that draw residents and tourists to the downtown. In order to reinforce and connect the downtown core anchors that already exist, Vision 2030 has a few planned/pending projects: Heritage State Park to be renamed Greylock Market and a school reuse project on East Main Street. In order to expand efforts to revitalize the Hoosic River, two projects have been proposed: a state park in one of two potential locations near the Porches Inn and a river greenway and bike path located by MASS MoCA along the river by Noel Field.

The Vision 2030 plan also proposes the overall improvement of the existing parks and recreational facilities like athletic complexes. This includes the improvement of parts of the municipal trail system, which is what our project is primarily focused on. Improving the trail systems will attract more visitors to the area and aid the overall success of the Vision 2030. Our goals also align with Vision 2030 because we hope to develop a larger and more connected network of trails and paths to provide residents of North Adams more opportunities to get

outside and strengthen community connections. Projects like the proposed bike/shared use path will be crucial to establishing this network¹⁰.

Case Studies

Our clients requested three case studies on successful municipal trail systems in order to assess how they were mapped and marketed, and then how this information is distributed. Our three case studies include Great Barrington, MA, Manchester, VT, and Northampton, MA.

Great Barrington, MA

The Great Barrington Trails and Greenways have developed a streamlined system of maps and brochures easily accessible on their website to look at or print and for sale at the Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce kiosk or Berkshire South Community Center. There is a comprehensive map of walking and biking trails with an inset for more detail of the Central Loop closest to downtown. Their clear trail mapping includes overall connectivity on a broad scale throughout the region in order to connect the downtown to nearby Lake Mansfield and further destinations including Monument Mountain and the Threemile Hill Trail. This comprehensive trail guide includes trails owned or managed by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, Berkshire Natural Resources Council, Berkshire South Regional Community Center, the Great Barrington Land Conservancy, the town of Great Barrington, and the Trustees of Reservations (a statewide nature preservation organization). Given the number of organizations involved with the trails in this relatively small geographic area, having a centralized, comprehensive map makes all of the information more clearly accessible to users from the area and visiting as tourists.

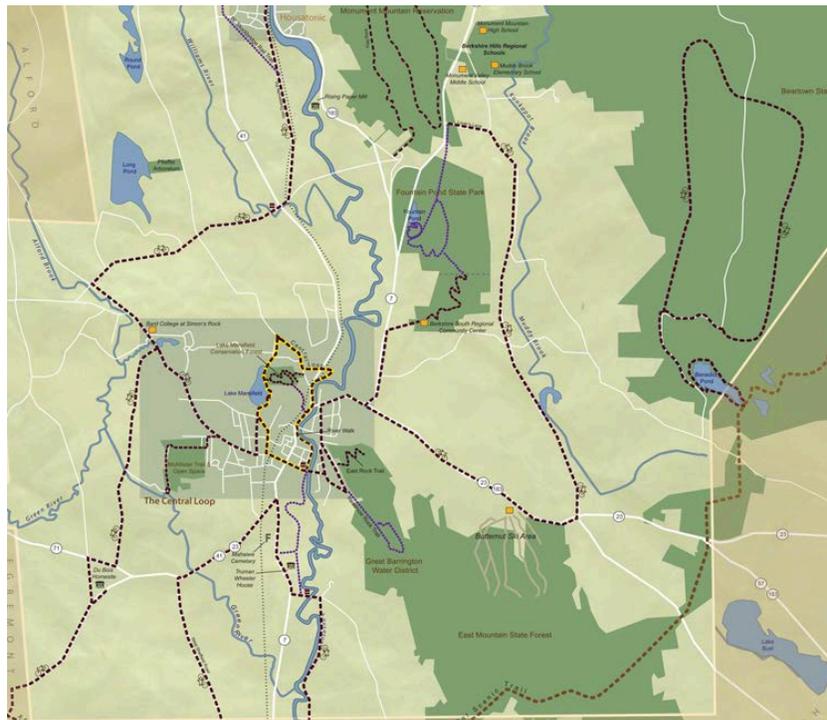
The open space map clearly delineates overall linkages and provides a space to see how proposed trails would fit into the larger picture of recreation in Great Barrington. The

¹⁰ Vision 2030

Appalachian trail is even marked because of its connection with bike and walking trails, however there could be increased connectivity so that a bike path on route 23 reaches the Appalachian trail. A negative aspect of this map is that the resolution does not allow a user to zoom in. This would be helpful and would decrease the necessity for individual maps of each specific area. Another way to improve this map would be to add points of interest in the inset on the right side detailing the Central Loop. This would make it easier to follow when a user is actually walking and could use landmarks or points of interest to navigate.

Monument Mountain trails are on a 503 acre property operated by the Trustees of Reservations, who operate public recreational land all throughout Massachusetts, and is a bit further from downtown, yet still manages to connect via a bike path. This is not a municipal trail system and is less like Windsor Lake, but provides many characteristics of successful promotional strategies for their trail systems that could perhaps be applied anyway. As a part of a larger network of operation, the Trustees might have more experience in organizing maps and trail information. The map is not a direct GIS layer, but still shows changes in elevation and uses intuitive icons, with a key. A detailed map of this area is available on the Trustees of Reservations website, but is not linked to the Great Barrington Trails online presence. The Great Barrington Trails website does have more detailed promotional brochures about three other hikes in the area, providing trail maps, directions, trail descriptions, trail use guidelines, special things to look for during the hike, detailed information about all affiliated organizations, and how to contact them if needed. These are easily laid out to be printed and distributed, are aesthetically pleasing, and provide plenty of information about what to expect on the hike. A problem with this is that it is a bit wordy if a user is just seeking quick facts (i.e. distance, time, elevation, uses). None of these pamphlets give the difficulty of the trail-- which isn't really a problem because they give so many other details, the hiker can know what to expect. However for time efficiency, the information about difficulty is similarly embedded into wordy descriptions.

In designing our comprehensive map of North Adams Municipal Trails I would recommend having a higher resolution map online in order to zoom, isolate a particular area, and download it for use. In the age of smartphones it is unlikely that most users would print these maps out themselves, and it is cheaper and more environmentally friendly for the town of North Adams to minimize the maps they must print and leave at the trailheads. The wordy descriptions, though very informative, neglect to also provide a section where fast facts can be found. Clearly providing distance, time, difficulty, accessibility, uses, and elevation gain would be very useful. Something quite unique about this website is its page "Where to go. What to do." This provides a visual overview of the places accessible right from downtown using icons to demonstrate uses along with websites to find more information about the fourteen areas listed. This essentially provides a guide to the web of information that can often be buried and difficult to find on the internet about local trailway connections¹¹.



¹¹ "Monument Mountain, Hiking near Great Barrington, Berkshires MA."

The Equinox Preservation Trust Trails in Manchester, VT

The Equinox Preserve consists of 914 forested acres alongside the slope of Mt. Equinox in Manchester, VT. Within these 914 acres there are approximately 11 miles of maintained, marked trails. 850 acres of this preserve were donated as “conservation easements” by the Equinox Resort and Spa. The remaining 64 acres of protected land were placed under the Vermont Land Trust in 2006. Similar to Windsor Lake, there is also the beautiful Equinox pond surrounded by a “Pond Loop” trail.

The Equinox Preserve’s website is easily navigable, especially with its clearly labeled “Maps/Trails” section. Within this section of this website there are 3 useful subsections: Interactive Map, User’s Guide, and Downloadable Map. In this simplicity, directing the website is clear and not at all confusing for even an amateur website visitor. This page gives key informational tidbits. The “Informational Kiosks” expresses exactly where one can access trail maps and “pocket guides.” At the physical entrance of trail networks one can find an “enlarged trail map along with copies of the handy pocket guide & trail map, updated program information and special notices”. This section also suggests how well-maintained these trails are with “Mutt Mitts” and disposal bins for hikers that want to bring their dogs. The page also directly explains “Access Points and Parking”. There are two main entrances with associated parking, however, they also have additional parking at the Equinox Hotel.

The website also supplies “General Trail Guidelines”, which places responsibility on the trail-hiker to clean up after themselves, and take pride in what they are experiencing. The Preserve is painted as a conserved area that needs our cooperation to be maintained. Each trail is explained in detail with distances, allowed uses (ex: hiking, cross-country skiing, etc.), as well as a two sentence description of the trail itself with its associated scenery/elevation. The interactive map is user-friendly, with different colors coinciding with different trails. However, GIS layers could make this map more useful, allowing website viewers to see more clearly the

terrain/habitat they would be encountering on various trails within the network. On the downloadable map, I believe we should definitely model their time suggestions when thinking about our comprehensive trail studies. It tells hikers if they have 1 hour they should do a certain trail, 2 hours: another, and so on.

Another great take-away from this trail system is its accessibility to the main town of Manchester, VT. It connects with other cultural attractions of the area quite well. For example, the trail system can be accessed via the Southern Vermont Arts Center during business hours. According to the interactive map, these trails also appear to be close to a Manchester downtown area called, "Manchester Village". There is also a section on the web-page that describes exactly how to get to Manchester, VT from surrounding areas, with a map. This is a great example to model North Adams' envisioned larger network trail system, as well enticing a tourist population to visit. With connected trails nearby each other, ultimately connecting with two downtown areas visible on the interactive map, residents as well as tourist users are encouraged to get active in nature while enjoying the cultural developed area. The website also has a liability section describing how the State of Vermont encourages private landowners' to keep their land open to public/recreation usage with decreased liability via state policies. That is interesting to think about in light of private landowners' presence at the Lake Windsor Trail in particular¹². (see picture of map on next page)

¹² Equinox Preservation Trust (EPT)

Northampton and helps to connect the overall trail network of the city, helping to promote a bustling community center that is already thriving.

Things we recommend would be a more distinctive and interactive map that contained local areas of interest along each of the trails. The trails should be labeled with names and should also list the mileage and level of difficulty of the trail and the age appropriateness of these trails. Also, the trail map is a pdf, and it is impossible to zoom in and out. We think a map that uses GIS and GPS that is run through google maps and/or google earth would be much better for the user and would increase usership.



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Background Information on Trail Assessments

¹⁴ Easthampton- Northampton Trail and Bicycle Map

In order to inform our assessment of the municipal trails in North Adams we referred to the Department of Conservation and Recreation “Trails Guidelines and Best Practices Manual.” This provided the following information about describing trail status:

“*Trail Class* is the prescribed level of trail development, representing the intended design and management standards of the trail. Five trail class categories are defined in terms of tread, obstacles, constructed elements, signs and typical recreation experience:

Class 1 Trails: Minimal/undeveloped trails

Class 2 Trails: Simple/minor development trails

Class 3 Trails: Developed/improved trails

Class 4 Trails: Highly developed trails

Class 5 Trails: Fully developed trails

These general categories are used to identify applicable trail design, management, and maintenance standards and appropriate managed uses. Section III includes a more detailed table of trail classes and their management attributes. Appendix E includes tables on trail design parameters by class and use.

Trail Condition

The DCR Road and Trail Inventory has classified all roads and trails by “condition” as good, fair or poor. “Good” trails have no or only very minor maintenance needs. “Fair” trails have management and maintenance needs of a typical nature. “Poor” trails have areas of significant trail damage and repair needs.

Managed Use

Managed Uses are the modes of travel that are actively managed and appropriate, considering the design and management of the trail. There may be multiple Managed Uses for any given trail segment. Managed Use represents a management decision or intent to accommodate or encourage a specific type of trail use.”¹⁵

ROS Class	Primitive	Semi-primitive	Semi-developed Natural	Developed Natural	Urban
Setting	Setting appears unmodified environment of large size. Evidence of other users is minimal. Area free from management controls.	A medium to large natural appearing environment. Interaction between users is low. Management controls are subtle.	Area is natural appearing, but sights and sounds of people and interactions with others are moderate. May include more developed areas.	Area is substantially modified. Interaction with others is moderate to high. Includes facilities designed for many people.	Substantially developed area, with urban elements common. Vegetation is often manicured. Large numbers of users present.
Experience	Users experience a high degree of isolation, independence, and self-reliance. Opportunities for challenge and risk are high.	Users experience a moderate degree of isolation, independence, self-reliance. Opportunities for challenge and risk present.	Equal degree of isolation and encountering others. Opportunities for interaction with nature. Challenge and risk are not important.	Encounters with others are common. Access is convenient. Physical setting is less important than the activities provided.	Presence of others is expected and desired. Observing natural appearing elements is important.

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¹⁵ *Trails Guidelines and Best Practices Manual 2014*

¹⁶ *Trails Guidelines and Best Practices Manual 2014: 7*

North Adams Municipal Trail Summary

Trail	Trail ROS Class	Condition	Trail attributes: Distance/Time, grade, etc.	Uses
Windsor Lake Trail System	Semi-developed Natural, Semi-Primitive	Fair, in need of drainage ditches and in-fill in numerous areas to smooth out trail surface	short loop: 2 miles (3,143 meters), mostly flat with short areas of incline, long loop: 3 miles, varied incline	diverse
Cascades Trail	Semi-Primitive	Good, isolated area in need of bridge replacement or repair and minimal need for infill to smooth out trail surface	.72 miles (1,155 meters) each way, flat, linear, two bridges over stream crossing	diverse
Riverbank at Noel Field	Developed Natural	Good, isolated area in need of maintenance or leveling	.65 miles (1,032 meters) each way, flat, linear	diverse, potential for ADA certification

Universal Design and Increasing Access

Improving the accessibility of these North Adams trails to the public at large is a main motivation driving our trail assessment project. It is a priority that North Adams increase handicap accessibility of their outdoor recreation opportunities and therefore we researched the parameters for a more universal trail design for at least one of our assessed trails. In order to comply with ADA guidelines, facilities like doors and gates, water fountains, bathrooms, inclines, parking areas, and public telephones must all be constructed accordingly. Additionally the width and incline of the trails must be

measured and meet certain requirements in order to accommodate wheelchairs¹⁷.

Once a trail is certified ADA accessible it is then listed among other trails online which provides users with disabilities information about suitable trails. For instance the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail is ADA certified and listed on their website.

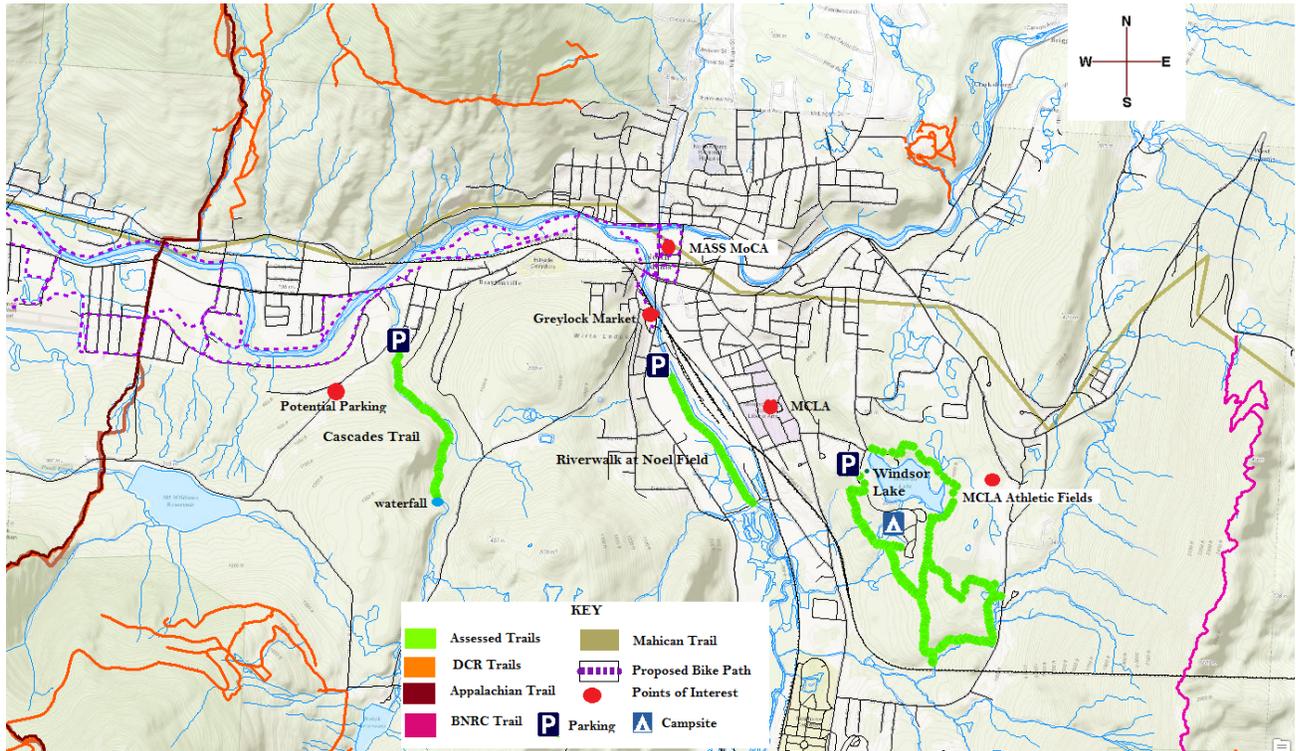
More information about the ADA guidelines would need to be consulted in order to make final decisions about the feasibility of each of these trails becoming handicap accessible. One distinction to be made is between ADA “accessible” and ADA “assessed” trails. Certified ADA accessible means that the trail must be either paved or surfaced with stonedust. They are generally .25 to .75 miles in length. An “assessed” trail focuses more on providing the information necessary for people with varying walking capabilities to make an educated decision about the trail’s suitability for them. This means that, though the trail probably is not paved and is a bit longer, usually .5 to 2 miles in length, “maps have been designed to provide information on grades, cross slopes, trail surfaces and obstacles.”¹⁸ Additionally universal design principles can be implemented, which are trail characteristics that benefit a wide range of people, from people using a cane to families with strollers. These guidelines include level thresholds and curb ramps, adequately wide paths for passing and for mobility aided users, and easy to operate entranceways and doors¹⁹. Improving accessibility aligns well with our goal of increasing visibility and knowledge about trail options in North Adams so that visitors of all capabilities know whether a trail is suitable for them.

¹⁷ Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority 2006

¹⁸“Accessible Hiking Trails”

¹⁹Frost, 2013

Municipal Trails Assessment



Our sites include the Windsor Lake trail system, the Cascades Trail on Marion Ave, and the Riverbank at the Noel Athletic Complex off State Road. These are all municipal trails owned by the city of North Adams that are easily accessible from downtown. Our clients chose these trails as a high priority for assessment because they are well used, inconsistently marked, and most importantly, already owned by the city. Above is an image of the three trails we are assessing. We have used a GPS device to track the course of the trails as we walked them to collect coordinates and map them-- something that has not been done before. The Cascades Trail is on the far left, the Riverbank at Noel Field is in the middle, and the Windsor Lake Trails lies to the far right. We can use maps to measure distance and help us view points of interest for future connectivity of these trail systems and other trail systems in the area.

North Adams is situated in the beautiful Berkshires, and is a post-industrial city of 13,500 residents. The Berkshires provide many opportunities for outdoor recreation. Long distance trails like the Long Trail, the Appalachian Trail, and the Mount Greylock trail systems are great

options for experienced hikers to appreciate the natural beauty, but it is also important to include trails for beginner hikers and walkers. The town of North Adams already owns and cares for trails throughout the municipality for this very purpose. However they are not well mapped and have very little signage, preventing most people from using them to their full capacity. We will be investigating a few particular sites in order to improve their viability and increase the number of patrons, both tourists and neighborhood residents of North Adams.

Basic Site Description: Windsor Lake



Windsor Lake Trail: A secluded system of trails with one major loop in a wooded area surrounding Windsor Lake

Directions: Heading east on Route 2/Mohawk Trail toward North Adams from Williamstown, take route into the center of North Adams. Take a right onto Church Street, and follow this street past the MCLA campus, until you reach Bradley Street on your left. This steep street will lead you to the entrance of Windsor Lake. The trailhead is located to the right of the campground car entrance.

Windsor Lake Trail System is a scenic, secluded loop in the forest that surrounds the body of water. For the majority of the hike, you will be in complete forest cover, immersed in nature. Halfway along the trail, a hiker can spot Windsor Lake peeping through the trees. The trail consists of one main loop, with options for a longer loop further along the trail. Both these options experience areas of slightly graded elevation change. This trail is perfect for a stroll any season. Especially during the warmer months when you can also take a dip in Windsor Lake or in the brook near the longer loop.

When arriving at Windsor Lake, a large sign welcomes visitors to the recreational area. The facility provides sandy beachfront access to the water, a launch for non-motorized boats, a grassy area with benches, a pavilion for summer concerts, areas for fishing, a campsite, a ropes course, and forested walking trails. Because of such a wide array of activities available from the parking lot and minimal signage regarding the trails, patrons often do not walk or hike.



Above: Lack of signage for trails on already existing information board

The extensive trail system around the lake lacks signage to direct visitors to the start of the trail and therefore it is underutilized. Interestingly signage does provide some information: no smoking, no dog walking, caution children at play, activities that are prohibited because it is a wildlife sanctuary, and the time the park closes. However, none of this is very welcoming to beginner or experienced walkers. The trail system at Windsor Lake is marked sparingly and inconsistently by orange spray paint on trees and rocks along a wide trail carved into the woods surrounding the lake. The trails are not marked well enough and lack any information to indicate difficulty, distance, time, or possible activities along the trail, whether its walking, running, cycling, horseback riding, or cross country skiing. The footpaths need maintenance in order to make them safe for as broad a range of people as possible, as well as to prevent further erosion from storm water runoff. We are tasked with citing improvements needed and creating maps to better market these trails to potential walkers.

In order to increase the regional connectivity, the Windsor Lake trails have the potential of connecting with the Joseph Zavattaro Athletic Complex on the MCLA

campus. This will not only contribute to a more connected walking and biking system, but may also increase usership from the MCLA student body. An interesting thing about this site is the intersection of public and private property. The trail encircling the lake goes through private property and the owner of that property has marked and cleared a trail so that the municipal trail can go uninterrupted. In the larger loop there are also areas near private property with No Trespassing signs. Without more consistent trail markings it is difficult for first time users to navigate the city owned trails and avoid private property.

User Information

Distance: Shorter Loop 2 miles, Longer Loop 3 miles

Approximate time: 40 minutes- 1.5 hours, depending on choice of loop

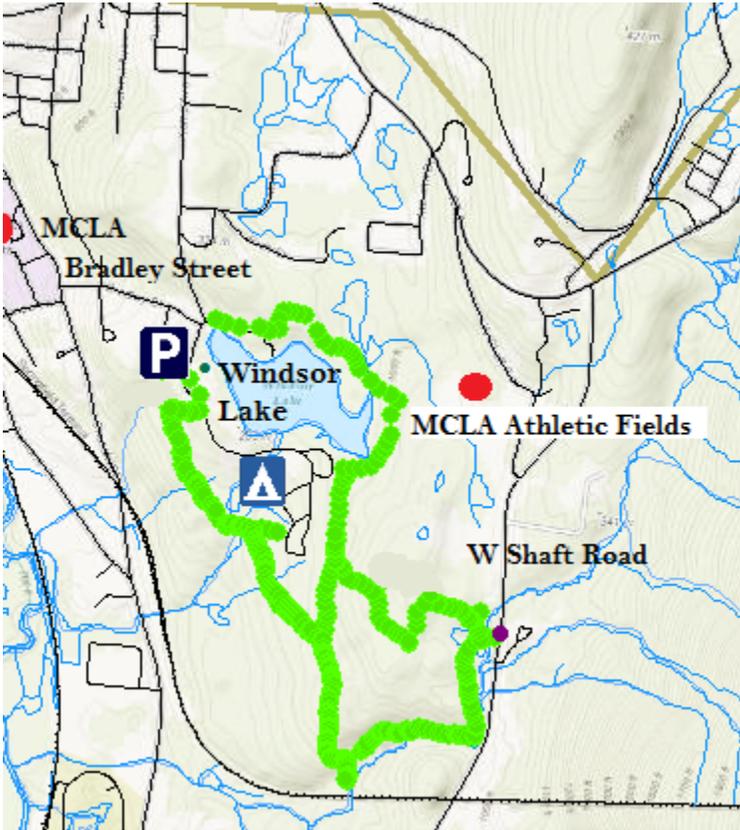
Difficulty: Beginner- Intermediate

Elevation change: slight changes in elevation along the shorter loop, moderate elevation gains in longer loop

Open until dusk

Uses: walking, running, snowshoeing, cross country skiing, horseback riding, swimming/wading, picnicking, dog walking

GPS/Field Work: Windsor Lake Trails



Windsor Lake Trail, the longest of our trails is a scenic, forested trail with views of the Lake at various points. It can be accessed from downtown Church Street by taking a left turn onto Bradley Street which leads traffic up to the Windsor Lake Beach/Pavillion area. Upon driving into the Windsor Lake area, there is an abundance of parking and clear access to the campground and Beach/Pavillion Area, but there are no signs directing visitors to the trail loop. There is, however, an unused informational bulletin board, which would be the perfect place to advertise the trails with associated maps (see right). Unless you are a frequent visitor of Windsor Lake and know the trails, it is unlikely a visitor would find the trail entrance with ease or be able to explore it without confusion. It is an unmarked opening in the trees to the right of the campground entrance.

Below Left: Entrance to Windsor Lake Campground, Below Right: Unmarked entrance to Trail



The trail begins at the bottom left of Windsor Lake as shown in the GIS map by a break in the green trail line on the GIS map. The trail system is made up of two main loops: A Shorter Loop and a Longer Loop. Both surround the entire body of water. Let's examine the Shorter Loop first. For three quarters of the trail, you walk in a forested, leafy covered area. The last part of the trail opens onto a road that takes you back to the parking lot area. It is a very scenic and peaceful experience in nature, with various recreation areas, however, it lacks clear direction. It's unclear signage leaves many points in the trail where a hiker could get confused or lost. There are various forks in the trail loop with no indication of where each option would lead the hiker (see right).

Once a hiker reaches the part of the trail that becomes a road, it is unclear whether to cross the road and continue walking into the woods, or turn left or right and walk along the road. In our fieldwork, we found that to complete the loop a hiker should take a left on the road, leading through a neighborhood of houses.



There is one area with “no trespassing” signs, which is not conducive to a user-friendly environment. Going right at this road opening would bring you to the MCLA athletic complex, but there is no sign indicating this. In the future this would be a great opportunity for connecting to a point of interest, and perhaps for a future maintenance partnership. After walking along the road for a few minutes, the trail loops behind a Windsor Lake resident’s private property. The resident was not only kind enough to allow the trail to cut through the back-part of his property, but he also marked it with clear blue flags and signs. His trail signage is arguably better-marked than the existing trail markings along the rest of the trail. We envision this trail with increased signage such as the below right photo, with clear direction for visitors.

Below Left: Trail Markers along the majority of Windsor Lake Trail, Below Right: Resident's Created Trail Markers



In addition to the confusing splits in the trail and a lack of signage along Windsor Lake Trail, there is also need for improvements and maintenance. At one point along the trail, there was a huge tree debris in the middle of the walking path. At various points, there were an abundance of roots making the trail difficult to traverse. There are also eroded areas that need proper drainage in order to conserve the sediments on the surface of the trail.

Below: Roots on trail



The Longer Loop at Windsor Lake follows the same trail as the Shorter Loop, but about halfway along, it veers right. There is no sign at this intersection, however, telling you where it will be leading you, how long it will take to get back to the Lake, or what kind of walking conditions this section of the trail may have. After taking this right we were led further away from the lake and up a few areas of more challenging elevation changes, and finally to the edge of a beautiful rushing brook. We walked along the rushing brook, a scenic amenity, for approximately half a mile until we reached a second access point to Windsor Lake's trail network at West Shaft Road. By West Shaft Road there was also an opening in the trail area, with no direction of where to turn next. Due to this lack of signage and markings, we ended up momentarily lost, walking in a circle at one point due to mismarked trails. Eventually we found our way back to the main Windsor Lake Trail Network, where the longer loop trail merges with the shorter loop trail by the campsite area



Above left and right: Rushing brook along Lower Loop

After assessing the trails by walking them thoroughly, and conducting interviews with community members (see Interview Summaries), we developed a table evaluating different improvements we had for each trail, and prioritized them accordingly. By weighing alternative options for improvement ideas at each trail, we could better visualize and deduce which improvements would be most beneficial to the trail. We analyzed the improvements by a set of 4 criteria: Cost, Benefit, Feasibility, and Priority. In the table below, (and in each trail's section) we have rated the trails on a scale of 1-4 for each criteria, with more qualitative assessments of benefits. We assessed cost: \$ being the least expensive and \$\$\$\$ being the most expensive. We measured an improvement's feasibility based on other restrictions aside from money including potential amount of infrastructural change needed: 1 being the least feasible of an option and 4 being the most feasible, or most practical solution. Finally, we rated improvement options by our priority measurement: 1 being the lowest priority, and 4 the highest priority. We assessed priority based on our experiences walking along the trails, and also recommendations we received from our clients and interviews (see later).

Evaluating Priorities

Improvement	Cost (\$- \$\$\$\$ other)	Benefit	Feasibility 1=lowest 4=highest	Priority 1= lowest 4= highest
Add signage at Intersection of Church St and Bradley St	\$	Increased visibility	4	3
Add signage at Trailhead	\$	Increased visibility and usage	4	4

Add markings and directions along trail	\$	Less confusion on trails, better hiking experience	2	4
Trail Grooming	none (volunteer)	Safer, more enjoyable experience	3	2
Bench Area along trail	\$	Opportunity for more time in nature, comfort	2	1
Community Event	Variable	Increased use	4	4
Parking	no improvement needed	N/A	N/A	N/A

Overall Recommendations

After assessing the trails and putting each suggestion through the evaluating priorities matrix, our overall recommendations are to increase signage in every way possible. More specifically, adding a sign at the intersection of Church Street and Bradley Street to entice visitors and newcomers to go to Windsor Lake. Also, adding a sign at the trailhead would be great because there currently is no sign and the entrance to the trail is not very visible to those who don't know where it is. We also decided that adding signage within the Windsor Lake Trails would be crucial to pedestrians because the trail diverges multiple times, especially if you decide to take the longer loop. Finally, community events could increase the appeal of Windsor Lake and bring people who are currently unfamiliar with the trails onto them. Windsor Lake has already done an

excellent job attracting visitors in the summer months, but more community events in the winter could encourage a more consistent population of visitors.

Future Connectivity

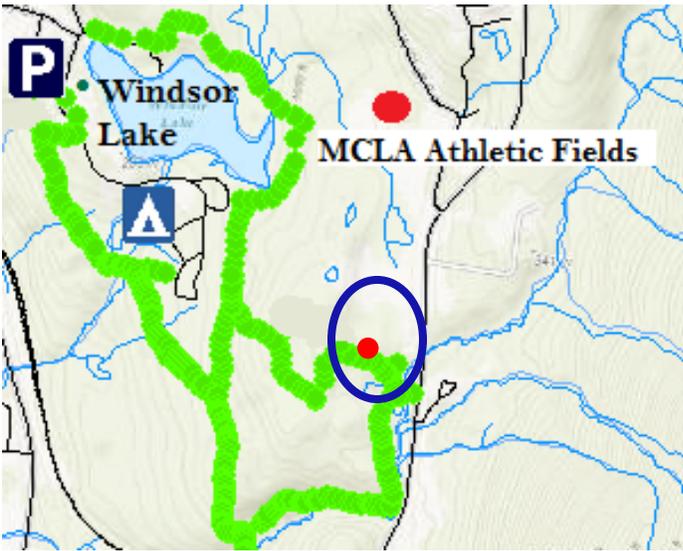
Windsor Lake, although it is a somewhat isolated trail network, seems to have multiple avenues for future connectivity. After looking at our map, the end of the Riverwalk at Noel Field reaches Foundry Road which is a potential link for those who are interested in continuing to Windsor Lake. Currently there are a few roads that could lead between the two trails, although it is a steep hill to get to Windsor Lake. Another potential connection was found in the close proximity of the Windsor Lake main loop to the MCLA Athletic Fields. Whether this connection would contribute to the overall connectivity of the North Adams trail network or not, it remains a valuable connection, and people will certainly benefit if this connection was made visible. A third connection is to the secondary access point of the longer loop of the Windsor Lake Trail on West Shaft Road. The trails provide an alternative walking route to travel between these two areas. (see pictures on the next page)



Left: Connectivity between Noel Field Potential Bike Path and Windsor Lake



Left: Connectivity with Windsor Lake and MCLA Athletic Fields



Left: Connectivity with new access point at West Shaft Road (marked by red dot in blue circle)

Basic Site Description: The Cascades Trail



Cascades Trail: A straight, flat, wooded trail that ends at a beautiful waterfall

Directions: Heading east on Route 2/Mohawk Trail toward North Adams from Williamstown, turn right on to Marion Ave after passing Notch Road. Follow Marion Ave all the way to the end where the trail begins.

The Cascades trail brings the walker from a residential neighborhood into a secluded wooded walk along a meandering stream. The walk is not a loop and ends at

the Cascades waterfall which is especially majestic after a heavy rain. This trail is wide and flat, good for beginner walkers and provides an escape into the natural world. Bring your children along so they can play amongst the roots and rocks beneath the wide canopy. In summer the shallow stream provides splashing grounds for all ages and the Cascades waterfall at the end is a perfect picnic location for any occasion.

While Windsor Lake feels close to MCLA's campus and also just up the hill from town, the Cascades trail is set back among houses on the residential Marion Ave. This trail follows "The Cascade," an offshoot of the Hoosic River that also connects to the Notch Reservoir. This natural attraction brings patrons even though no amenities have been added. Certain improvements to the trail and entryway are recommended in order to widen the appeal of this public greenspace. Community members are primarily drawn to this space because of the river and a potential to swim and wade in during Summer months or picnic by the waterfall at the end of this trail. Insufficient parking and lack of amenities do not deter visitors, and this naturally beautiful space has an inherent draw. Increasing visibility and accessibility will be our primary concern when considering how this space can best serve the North Adams community and their goal to provide healthy outdoor recreation options. However, parking becomes a major problem when we think about advertising this trail further.

User Information

Distance: .72 miles, 1.44 round trip

Approximate time: 25 minutes each way

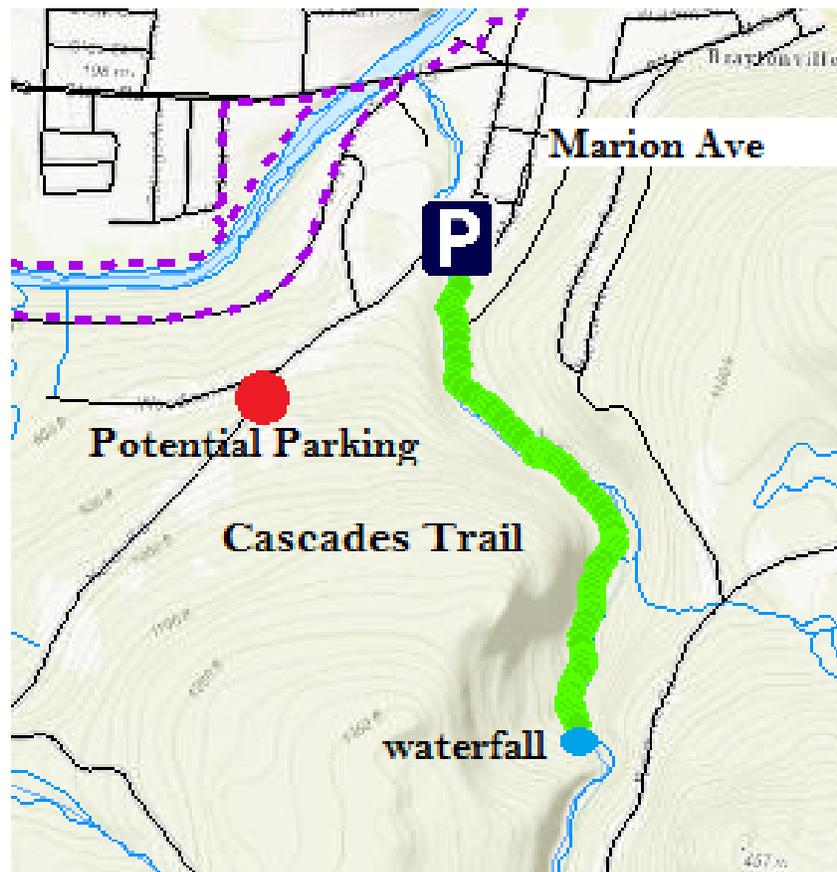
Difficulty: Beginner

Elevation change: minimal

Open until dusk

Uses: walking, running, snowshoeing, cross country skiing, swimming/wading, picnicking, dog walking

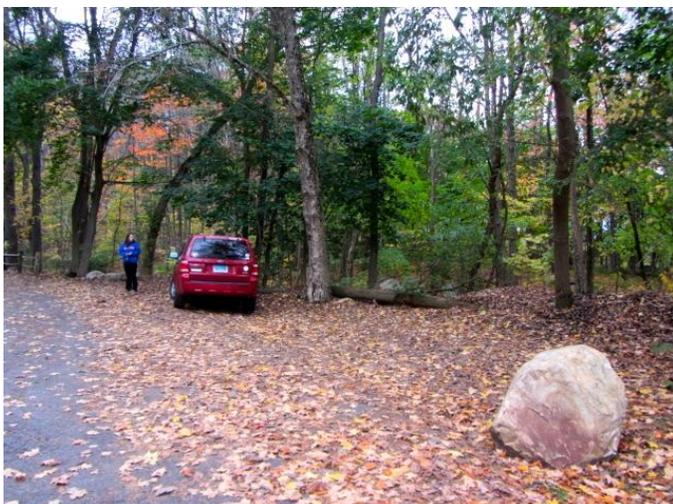
GPS/Field Work: The Cascades Trail



The Cascades Trail runs along the length of a small brook with a beautiful waterfall at the end. It is located at the end of Marion Road off of Rt 2, but has no signage to indicate that it is there. This means that the only visitors are those who already know where it is, making it unlikely that tourists or beginner walkers and hikers would venture to this trail.

Our first recommendation is to add a sign at the intersection of Rt 2 and Marion Road to invite walkers to the trail. Then at the end of the road there is space along the road for two or three cars to park. This is an unofficial parking lot that may deter people from parking and staying for a while. In order to solve this problem a sign could be added indicating that this area is intended for parking. A larger improvement, but one that would enhance this trail a lot, would be to pave this area and mark individual spots, perhaps increasing the area to accommodate four cars. But we are also unsure if parking is actually even legal in this area (see below left).

The only sign in this area indicates that it closes at dusk-- there is opportunity for a much more enticing sign (see below right). This would be the perfect opportunity to



make a large map, telling a little bit about the trail, its distance, the waterfall at its end, and the activities it is suited for. The trail itself is well maintained and doesn't need much more improvement.

Evaluating Priorities

Trail Improvements	Cost (\$-\$\$\$\$, other)	Benefit	Feasibility 1=lowest 4=highest	Priority 1= lowest 4= highest
Add signage at Intersection of Rt. 2 and Marion Ave	\$	High increase in visibility, resulting increased usage	4	4
Add signage at end of Marion Ave/ trailhead	\$	Moderate increase in visibility	4	3
Infill trail areas with sediment to make safer	\$	Safer hiking experience, wider usage	3	1
Add bench	\$\$	Aesthetics and comfort	4	1
Add new bridge	\$\$\$	Safer and better aesthetically	3	3

Parking Improvements	Cost (\$-\$\$\$\$, other)	Benefit	Feasibility 1=lowest 4=highest	Priority 1= lowest 4= highest
Allow on-street parking	Other: Residential Zoning change	Increased parking and Usage	2	4
Widen paving at end of road to	\$\$\$ Other:	Increased parking and	1	3

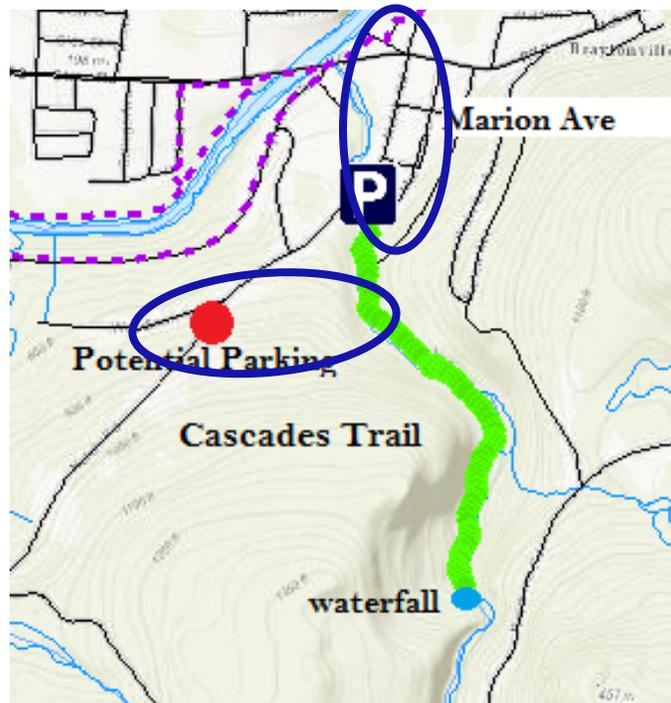
include three parking spots	Residential Zoning change	Usage		
Add bike rack	\$\$	Alternative to parking, encourages physical activity	3	4
Add public transport stop	Bus route changes	Alternative to parking	2	1
Fix up and direct cars to parking lot at 300 Notch Road	\$\$\$\$, leveling, paving, recutting trail	Increased Usage, without increased car traffic on Marion Ave.	2	3

Overall Recommendations

Our recommendations for the Cascades Trail are two fold, as you can see from the split priority matrix. Our first goal is to provide solutions for the parking issue. The residents are unhappy with the amount of people that are parking next to their homes and how much traffic it attracts on their quiet residential street. This parking issue can be solved in a number of ways, including adding a bike rack, adding a public transportation stop, adding on street parking, but the solution that would address all of these concerns is to add a parking lot at 300 Notch Road, though it is very expensive. Our other recommendations include adding a sign at Route 2 and adding a sign at the trailhead: two easy and inexpensive ways to get more people using the trails. If increasing visibility with this signage attracts more visitors then parking will become even more of a problem.

Future Connectivity

The Cascades Trail's location in close proximity to Route 2 makes it a viable connection to a proposed bike path that should be put in place as a part of the North Adams Vision 2030 and the River Revival Project. Adding a bike rack and advertising the trail could create a nice connection and increase usership of the trail without adding to the parking problem (see upper blue circle). Additionally, there is municipally owned property on 300 Notch Road that could potentially be used as a parking lot, which would connect to the trail. However, this idea would certainly be costly due to leveling, paving and recutting the trail's entrance; but it would solve the parking problem (see lower blue circle, and red dot).



Basic Site Description: The Riverbank at Noel Field



Riverbank at Noel Field: “A flat, open trail along the Hoosic River with views of surrounding mountains”

Directions: Heading east on Route 2/Mohawk Trail toward North Adams from Williamstown, as you enter North Adams take the ramp on the right side (W. Main Street) and then take a right at the light onto Route 8 East towards Wal-Mart (State Street). Follow this road until you reach Noel Field on your left.

The Noel Field River berm is a straight, wide, and flat trail that runs along the bank of the Hoosic River. The walk provides for nice views of the scenic mountains that surround North Adams as well as nice views of an area of the river free from cement flood chutes. The berm can be advertised in a similar way as the Mayor’s downtown

loop because it's flat and easily accessible. It is accessible from multiple parking lots that surround Noel Field and is discreetly located along the river bank. It is not visible from the parking lots in large part due to the lack of any signage, as well the fact that the trail is located moderately far away. The trail starts at Noel Field and ends where Hunter Foundry road crosses the Hoosic. Overall, it is an easy, open, scenic walk that is accessible and fun for all ages. It is important to note, however, that the primary purpose of this river berm is flood control. When the Army Corps of Engineers developed a flood protection system along the Hoosic River, one of the resulting effects was the creation of a flat, grassy levee like the one found at Noel Field. It creates an ideal spot for walking along the river, however, advertising this area as a walkable trail would be under the jurisdiction of the Army Corps of Engineers.

Noel Field Athletic Complex is situated geographically between the Cascade Trail and the Windsor Lake trails. It is used for baseball, basketball, softball, soccer, football, and tennis games, and there is also space for spectating, playground activities and walking tracks. The Hoosic River runs along the length of this park, providing a natural amenity in addition to the athletic facilities maintained for community use. This site can be connected to a greater network of riverside trails and presents a good space to be connected by bike lanes to the intended expansion of regional bicycle paths.

User Information

Distance: .75 miles, 1.5 miles round trip

Approximate time: 20 minutes each way

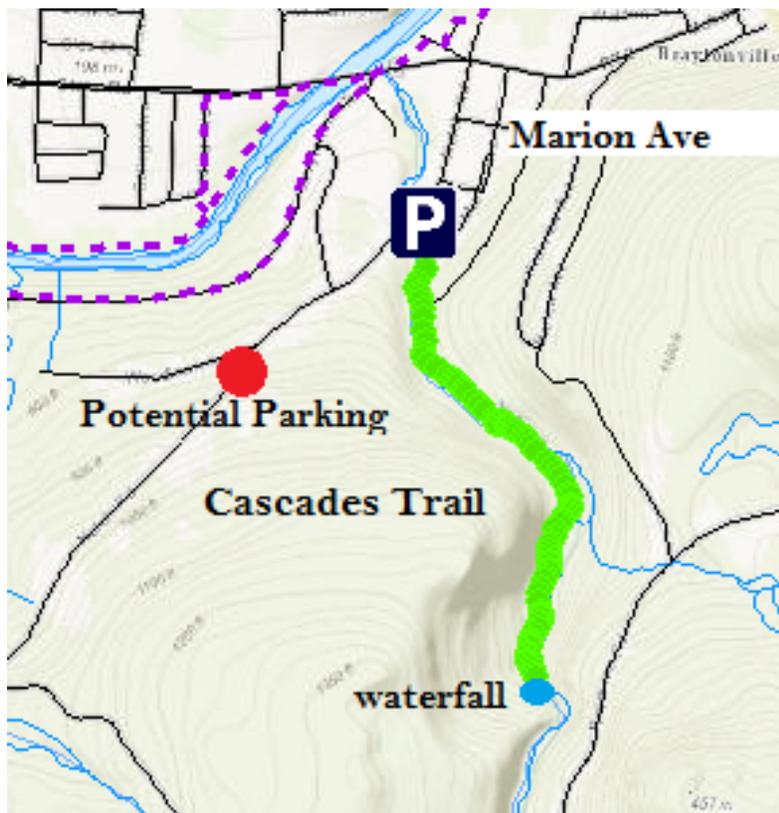
Difficulty: Beginner

Elevation change: minimal

Open until dusk

Uses: walking, running, snowshoeing, cross country skiing, picnicking

GPS/Fieldwork: Riverbank at **Noel Field**



The Riverbank at Noel Field is located off Route 8 near downtown North Adams. The trail abuts the Hoosic River and is a flat and fairly straight trail. It starts behind one of Noel Field's dugouts and continues along the river. Although it is a grass trail, it could be ADA accessible; it is very flat and easy to maneuver, although one would have to be assisted. A downside to the trail is that it is not marked at all. The trail is essentially raised and flattened grass that serves as the top of the western bank of the river. The trail would be perfect on a cool day, with crisp views of the river bend and mountain. Currently along the walk, there are no points of interest to stop and enjoy and there are no seating areas.

Below: Riverbank at Noel Field



One significant benefit to the trail is that it runs along the river. A partner in the Vision 2030 is the Hoosic River Revival pilot project, a group working to restore parts of the river through the construction of attractive public spaces that will benefit the North Adams community. One section of the Riverbank at Noel Field is being considered for a pilot project in the Hoosic River Revival plan, which would contribute to the overall use of the trail. Additionally, the intensive usage of Noel Field during the summer months

will add to the trail's usage. This is already a heavily used area by many different sections of the North Adams population and the addition of one sign would make this trail a main attraction of this location.

Evaluating Priorities:

Improvement	Cost (\$- \$\$\$\$, other)	Benefit	Feasibility (1=lowest, 4=highest)	Priority (1= lowest, 4= highest)
Add signage at parking lot	\$	Increased visibility and usage, but many areas to park	4	2
Add signage at beginning of trail	\$	Increased visibility and usage	4	4
Level out area with bumps	\$	Safer walking experience (especially for elderly)	2	4
Bench area	\$\$	Maximize benefit from proximity to river, to sit and enjoy water	2	1
River Access	\$\$	Capitalize on River accessibility, draw more visitors	4 (as part of River Revival)	3
ADA Handicap Accessibility	\$\$\$\$	Increased access to trail for all people	1 (various regulations)	3

Overall Recommendations

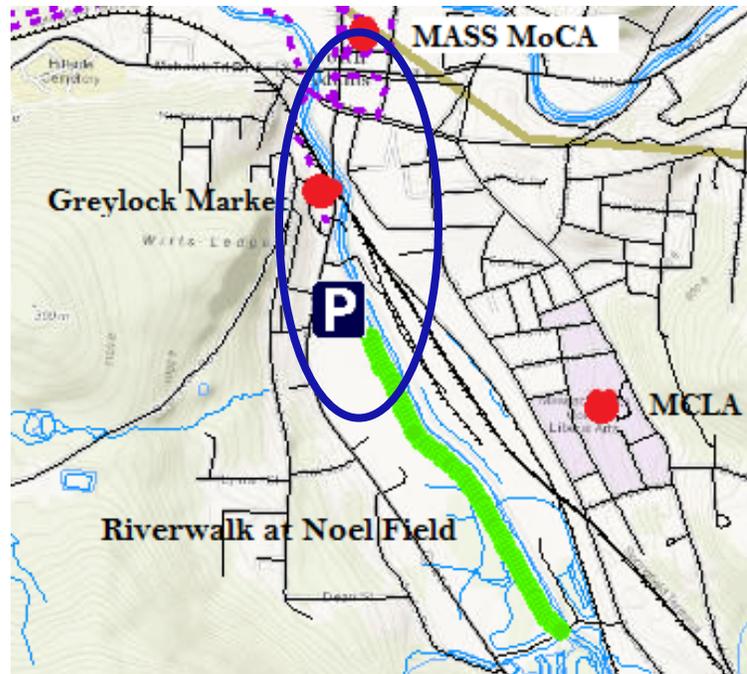
For the Riverbank at Noel Field, a lot of the benefits and recommendations that we as a team have found revolve heavily around the Hoosic River Revival Pilot Project.

If this pilot project goes through and is successful, it could make a lot of our suggestions a reality. For example, if the revival is implemented it will increase river access and visibility, as well as potentially making the trail universally accessible, which is partially reliant on the possibility of the proposed bike path being built along the Hoosic River. Our other recommendations for the trail include adding signage. Like the Cascades Trail, this extra signage will encourage residents of North Adams to visit. Since adding signs is an inexpensive addition to implement, it ranks high on our priority list. Leveling out bumps along the path would also increase universal accessibility if this river bank is were to be approved and advertised as a walkable trail, dependent upon the Army Corps of Engineers.

Future Connectivity

One of the main reasons we are excited about the future of the Riverbank at Noel Field is because of how this area connects with the goals of the North Adams Vision 2030. Different aspects of the North Adams Vision 2030, as well as the Hoosic River Revival Pilot Project include a new bike path that will run along route 2 and then travel south down route 8 along the Hoosic River. The placement of the bike path could end up aligning with the Riverbank, which would greatly improve connectivity with this area. It would attract more people not only through use of the bike path, but with its creation more age groups would be able to use it, as a newly paved, wide and flat trail. Another potential contribution to the Vision 2030 is the proposed Greylock Market, which is the redesign of Heritage State Park. Since the Riverbank at Noel Field is so close to Heritage State Park, any new development in that area will be beneficial to the

Riverbank as far as attracting users. Finally, a third aspect of the Vision 2030 that will impact this area for the better is the aforementioned Hoosic River Revival. As you can imagine, this pilot project will be great for the Riverbank. We are extremely excited about these new developments and how they will increase usership of the Noel Field Riverbank through increased connectivity.(see below)



Hoosic River Revival Project

November 10, 2014 was an exciting moment for the town of North Adams, and for our trail assessment project at large. The local Hoosic River Revival Project was granted \$500,000 by the state to fund its design of river revival pilot project. For years, the Hoosic River flowing through downtown North Adams has been swallowed up by unattractive concrete flood shoots, further swallowing up a huge amenity to the town. After a disastrous flood in the 1950s, the U.S. Corps of Engineers decided to construct

these 45 foot wide and 10-15 foot high concrete flood shoots along the river. While these shoots have succeeded in decreasing flooding and protecting the town, they have significantly aged and some parts of the river are in need of change. With tireless determination, community member Judith Grinnell has been a monumental leader in the Hoosic River Revival Project. “Reclaiming a Community Treasure in North Adams” is the mission statement of the Hoosic River Revival²⁰.

The Hoosic River Revival Pilot Project will focus on a mile long segment of its South Branch, from Foundry Road to the bridge by the Sons of Italy Parking Lot in Heritage State Park. This is very exciting for our North Adams Trail Project considering part of the revival focuses directly on the Riverbank by the Noel Field Athletic Complex. By enhancing direct access to the river, the revival will provide opportunity for walkers and bikers to be up close and really experience the water. Another goal of the revival is to provide “a much wider, healthier river with many recreation and small commercial opportunities, such as fishing, kayaking, bicycling”.²¹ This is an extreme asset when thinking about the experience of Noel Field Riverbank in the future. Shown below is the River Revival Project Map Plan. The Noel Field Riverbank can be located directly above the Noel Field Baseball Complex, running adjacent the Hoosic River. The potential walking trail is shown in full in the second picture below. The future connectivity with the proposed Greylock Market, formerly Heritage State park along Route 8, is another

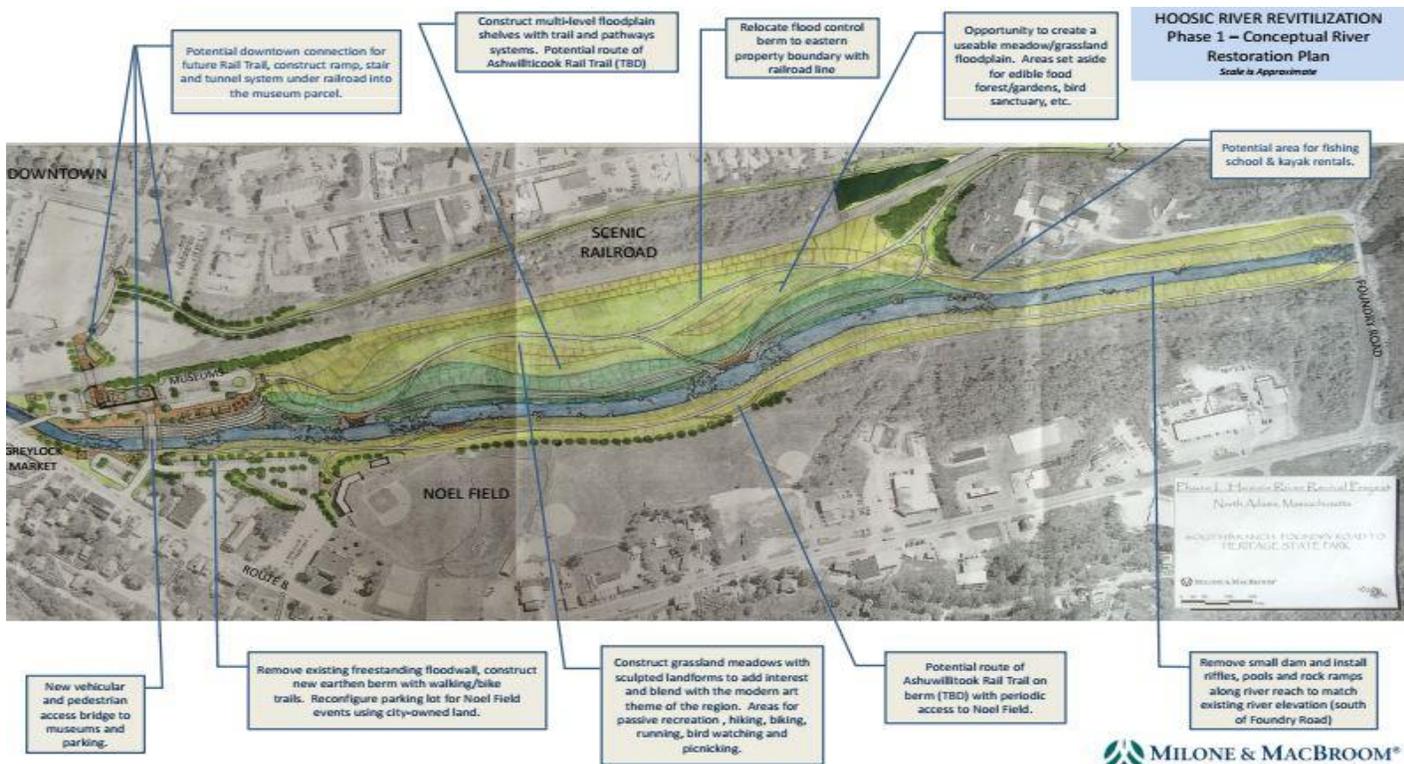
²⁰ Our Mission, Hoosic River Revival

²¹ Damon, 2014

exciting amenity to this area of town.



Above: Hoosic River Revival Pilot Project: South Branch



Above: Zoomed out version of Hoosic River Revival Pilot Project

Interview Summaries

In a series of interviews with a wide variety of North Adams community members, we derived important information regarding the current state of the trails, as well as ideas for our future recommendations. This is the format of the questions we asked:

1. Have you ever visited this trail/how often?
2. What other trails do you use?
3. Are you satisfied with this trail/Which is your favorite?
4. Does this trail currently benefit this community? Yes No
5. What improvements would make it benefit the community more? Do you have any suggestions? What improvements do you think would increase the likelihood that you would walk here?

For example:

- a. Improved Signage with length/difficulty
 - b. Community-wide Events
 - c. More interactive trail activities for children
 - d. Local School Involvement
 - e. Improved Trail Accessibility: Parking, Bike racks
 - f. Improved Trail Maintenance/Quality
 - g. More areas or amenities for picnics/sitting
 - h. Other:
6. Is it important to you for trails to connect to downtown? Yes No
If yes, please explain.
 7. How do you see this trail connecting to other points of interest within North Adams?
 8. Would you be interested in any events at this site? Yes No

9. Do you think community members would attend? Yes No
10. What kinds of events?
11. Do you have any ideas for projects to make the trails more popular?
- a. Elementary school class making a story walk at Cascades
 - b. Community guided walks at Windsor Lake
 - c. Community Events/Concerts/Picnics
 - d. Facts about the trail (geology, plants, history, etc.)
 - e. Walk-a-thons/Mayor's Challenge/Running Events
 - f. Family Friendly Activities
 - g. Other:
12. Do you know if this trail is currently maintained? By whom?
13. Do you have any suggestions of groups that could contribute to maintenance?
14. Would you or your organization be interested in helping with maintenance or partnering for event planning at this site? If so, who should we contact in order to set this up or create a partnership?

Interview with Amanda Chilson: Mass in Motion, November 8, 2014

In a phone conversation, we interviewed one of our clients: Amanda Chilson, Program Coordinator for Mass in Motion, North Adams. Amanda enjoys using the trails in the warmer seasonal months of spring, summer, and fall, and documented going to Windsor Lake approximately two times a month. Now that her son is at an older age, she likes to hike the Lake loop with him. She also really enjoys running along the Noel Field River Trail. She is satisfied with the trails, however, believes various aspects could be improved, like parking at the Cascades Trail. She was unsure about the legal status of parking by Cascades, due to its residential zoning, however, she provided us with

possible solutions. One of her suggestions was using the old Shell station along Route 2 as an alternative parking solution, and hikers could bike to the trailhead from there.

When we asked her if she would be interested in the trails connecting more directly to downtown she said yes, though not by extending the actual trail heads. She would like to increase visibility in the downtown area with more signs and kiosks. She also suggested the use of public transportation in the downtown area to connect people with trailheads like Windsor Lake and the Cascades. She also expressed a lot of interest in Windsor Lake connecting with the MCLA athletic fields.

Family use of trails was very important to Amanda, and potentially including the trails in local classroom curriculums. She was also very interested in community events taking place along these trails at various points in the year. She did not have any insight to who maintains the trails, aside from unofficial, regular trail users. Though she suggested utilizing Neighborhood Groups for future maintenance of the trails. Currently, the West End Neighborhood Association maintains the Cascades Trails. She suggested “Adopt-a-Trail” events, or Community Service Days with MCLA students or Williams College Students.

Interview with Mayor Alcombright

In our interview with Mayor Alcombright, he mentioned that he uses that trails frequently. His favorite trail is the Windsor Lake trail, but he does use Cascade Trail and Noel Field, but not as often as he does with a few other trails in the local area: Clarksburg State Park, trails at Greylock Glen, Appalachian Trail, as well as many of the trails in Williamstown.

As far as his major recommendations, he stressed that unless you were a North Adams resident for a long period of time, it would be difficult for you to find these trails. Increased signage was his top priority, which included signs along Route 2 and 8, in popular places in North Adams downtown, at each of the trail heads as well as within the actual trails. Another major recommendation of his was the implementation of maps. He was aware that we were only concentrated on the three trails that we mentioned to him, but a simple but easy to use comprehensive map of all of the local trails would be very convenient for locals and tourists alike. He also urged more specific maps be placed at the trailhead for tourists and newcomers. Finally, he recommended that maintenance be improved and suggested that the juvenile court could designate people to help in this effort with those assigned community service; he also recommended the City Department of Public Works.

Interview with Jim Stakenas: Vice President of MCLA, December 3, 2014

We wanted to speak with someone in the administration at MCLA in order to gauge the student interest in the trails and the possibility to partner with MCLA in either maintenance of the Windsor Lake trails or in community event planning. We also hoped to get more information about how Windsor Lake trails could connect with the Athletic complex. When we spoke with the Vice President Jim Stakenas, he told us that he personally had never used the trails. But he thought that the trails could be used by other organizations at MCLA. He recommended speaking with Celia Norcross (413-662-5102) who is the Director of Student Development and responsible for student programming. She would be the person to contact if we wanted to plan a joint event or if we wanted to distribute maps or promotional materials on campus.

Interview with Cindy and Mark Rosenburg: Campsite Managers, November 20, 2014

Cindy thought that her campers could greatly benefit from a trail map and brochure about trails in the area. She would be happy to distribute these to her campers when they are developed. However she personally has never walked on any of the trails that we are assessing, including the Windsor Lake trails even though they connect directly to the campsite area that she manages. She feels that the trails could always be improved more. She has noticed that visitors come year round to Windsor Lake for many different reasons, including hiking and snowshoeing on the trails. She has been told that the signage at intersections within the Windsor Lake trail system is inadequate and confusing. This also makes the case for providing a map to hikers.

Cindy didn't really see how the trails could connect to other points of interest in North Adams, so it would be important to advertise the connections that we propose in our "Future Connectivity" section of this paper because they are not necessarily well-known connections. She is in support of future events at Windsor Lake including guided nature hikes, snowshoeing, and cross country ski events. Cindy and Mark who manage the campsite do not know who maintains the trails there and would not have time to do it themselves.

Interview with Tad Ames: Berkshire Natural Resource Council, November 25, 2014

The significant takeaways from Tad were fairly simple because he only used the Cascades Trail regularly. He did have a lot of recommendations for the trail however. He understood that our initiative is inevitably going to lead to more people using all of these trails. That will be a serious issue when it comes to the minimal amount of parking available for the Cascades Trail. He is aware that the neighbors aren't happy with the way that their property is

being misused. Providing ample parking for the Cascades Trail was his highest recommendation by far. He also recommended more maintenance near the falls, and possibly reconstruction of bridges and trails to accommodate more groups of people if possible.

He knew a little about the Windsor Lake trails and recommended more trail signage within the trails, a recommendation that we have already had. Additionally, he recommended connecting with the MCLA athletic fields and possibly BNRC trails, but acknowledged that this was most likely of lesser importance than other suggestions.

He had little knowledge of Noel Field, in fact he didn't know what I was referring to until I told him that it was adjacent to the field that the Steeplecats play on, indicating the lack of awareness pervading the town regarding the trail on the Riverbank by Noel Field. After I described the trail he made a correct assumption that this trail would be suitable for walking dogs. He referenced the frequent use of Cole Field for walking dogs and recommended the implementation of posts where you could dispense dog bags from. This could potentially foster a small population of regular dog walkers to bring people to the trail.

Interview with President of the Hoosic River Revival: Judy Grinnell, December 1, 2014

"Bringing the river to life will bring the city to life," said Judith Grinnell, president of the Hoosic River Revival Project, in an interview on December 1, 2014. The main goals of the Hoosic River Revival is to create a user-friendly river. A river that should be swimmable, boatable, and also have clear and safe access points. By making the river waterfront an aesthetically pleasing area, while maintaining protection, the Hoosic River can be transformed from an "eye sore to an asset"(Grinnell 2014).

It is an exciting time for Judy and the entire Hoosic River Revival Team. The current \$500,000 funding granted to the Revival will be kickstarting the project, by allowing them to decide on a design firm to really get this project underway. Prospective firms for this project will provide ideas and projections of the project to Judy and her team, with criteria provided to them

by her as well. Once the firms submit their proposals, the Revival team will choose a firm that best fits the needs of the community, has had experience with river revivals, and are willing to complete a design in a short period of time. For future funding of the project, which is estimated to be approximately 9 million dollars from start to finish, Judy is looking to the senate, in the 2 billion dollar Massachusetts Environmental Bond Bill.

The current drawings and ideas surrounding phase 1 of the River Revival, directly impact the Riverbank at Noel Field, an added asset to the future area. The scrap metal yard currently running adjacent to the river and along a future part of trail is hopefully being moved. The only setback is that it currently employs 17 people. According to Judy, the owner, Mr. Apnik, is very interested in moving. Due to his close vicinity to the river, he has been fined, and is currently looking for a new area. Judy has even suggested renaming the trail "Apnik Way". In place of the old scrap yard there has been much speculation for future use. The website endorses a potential bird sanctuary, or aesthetic, green floodspace. Judy also suggested placing a kayak rental business in this area, to help users take advantage of the newly accessible river. The trail itself will begin at the Sons of Italy parking lot by the new Greylock Market, where the flood shoot walls are coming down, and the river will be widened, making for a much more pleasant option for an entrance to the trail.

The River Revival Project also plans to remove the fences that run alongside the river, obstructing the potential for a looping path. The city can easily take down these fences, lending to a beautiful, 4.3 mile loop, for the Riverbank at Noel Field. There will also be the addition of a bike path along either side of the river berm, adding yet another amenity to this area as a pedestrian and cyclist friendly atmosphere, and opening up the Noel Field area for future connectivity with other bike trails in North Adams. The goal is to connect the walking trails and bike path to the Greylock Market, by the current bridge near the Sons of Italy Parking lot, or by the new bridge going in via route 8.

When we asked Judy about increasing visibility of trails like the Riverbank at Noel Field, Windsor Lake, and Cascades, she highly suggested an online presence. “Everyone gets their information online these days,” she said. With easy access to online brochures, visitors will be able to find these trails with ease. With better online presence, she also suggested that North Adams needs an informational booth or map vendor, similar to the one you can find at the bottom of Spring Street in Williamstown. It needs to be present in the North Adams downtown area.

Getting people more active on these trails is also one of our major goals. Judy suggested monthly historical walks in the area, by utilizing local boy scouts and girl scouts as guides. Or the Chamber of Commerce could provide these guided walks via a corps of volunteers, that explore the natural beauty and history of the city. When we asked about Judy’s thoughts on maintenance, she said the goal would to have a trail be designed to be low maintenance. She also said that once the community has more pride in their local treasures like the river and associated trails, they would naturally value it more, and want to take care of it.

In thinking about future connectivity of these trails, the River Revival Project also has a long term plan: the Museum Mile walk/bike path. This could be guided walking/biking tour from mass moca to Eclipse mills, following the river. There is currently a bike path planned from MASS MoCA to Windsor Mills, which could become a spur of this future Mile walk. The Windsor Mill is currently home to a few small businesses, and also has room for a gallery. These are all neat attractions that would make the walk a central focus to the downtown area. It could also potentially connect well with Windsor Lake Trails, and the Riverbank at Noel Field.

Interview with Dot Houston: Assistant Athletic Director MCLA, December 1, 2014

Dot works in close proximity to the Windsor Lake trails and has therefore visited before, but not frequently and doesn’t know the extent of the trails. She has never visited the other two trails we are assessing. However she does enjoy walking along the BNRC trails near the

hairpin turn along Route 2 when traveling out of North Adams to the east. She does feel that the trails as they are benefit the community, but that improvements are necessary.

Dot didn't feel strongly that maintenance was needed on the Windsor Lake pathways, but that there should definitely be increased signage and trail markings. Including the length and difficulty of the trails would be helpful and in particular if a trail is advertised, the parking areas should be marked on a map or there should be indications if there is no parking. It is not a priority that trails connect to downtown, but instead that there is ample parking.

Because she works in the athletic department she is aware that the Windsor Lake trails could connect to MCLA's Joseph Zavattaro Athletic Complex. When students walk from campus to the athletic complex they walk up Bradley Street, to the parking lot at Windsor Lake, and through the campground. However, nearby there are areas of private property that have posted No Trespassing signs. Dot worries that the connection between the Windsor Lake trails and the athletic complex would go through private property if fully connected.

Dot's main suggestions came in the form of possible events to hold at the Windsor Lake trails. She thinks it would be a good idea to connect with other events like the HoorWa canoe festival or the Adams cross country ski event as Windsor Lake could be an additional location. In order to plan and advertise these events she suggests contacting specific groups rather than posting notices or providing brochures in downtown stores. Some groups she mentioned are: MCLA P.E. hiking classes, the Adams Youth Center, local YMCA after school programs, other organizations of groups of children. To increase the number of visitors on a regular basis, Dot recommended advertising the trails as good dog walking areas to the people who frequently walk their dogs at Cole Field. Also the Windsor Lake trails could be promoted as easy trails to walk at lunch time for people working nearby.

Her recommendations for improving advertisement of the trails is to make a brochure of all trails to be distributed at the campsite, at the tourist information center, among residents, and around downtown, while also creating an online presence on North Adams Tourism and Travel

on iberkshires.com. In order to distribute it to residents she mentioned tapping into the K-12 school networks. For example the superintendent of schools in North Adams sends emails and the Williamstown Elementary School has the WES newsletter to keep members of the school community updated. It would be helpful to ask parents how they generally get their news about local events.

Though she found the trail well maintained, she suggested that either the MCLA outing club or a community service event trail clean up could contribute to maintenance in the future. Dot said to contact Spencer Moser (413-662-5251) in the MCLA Center for Service to plan a trail clean up day or Diane Collins (diane.m.collins@mcla.edu) in order to contact the MCLA outing club because she oversees all clubs.

Interview with Nancy Bullet: Windsor Lake Planning Committee, City Council Member,
Employee of MCLA, November 14, 2014

Nancy Bullet described her favorite trail to be at Windsor Lake. She does not walk the other two trails often, because she finds the Cascades and Noel Field too short. Windsor Lake, on the other hand, has a longer distance and greater variety. Another trail she likes to hike is the Berkshire Natural Resource Council owned trail that can be found going east on Route 2 by the hairpin turn. She likes the moderate difficulty level it offers, and believes it is nice for visitors to have options of trails with different difficulty levels.

As part of the Planning Commission at Windsor Lake, Nancy described many of the community activities that already take place at the locale. In the winter snowshoeing is the most popular event. At the camper's pavilion in the cold winter months, there is a "Bring your own Snowshoes" event, with hot chocolate and a fire pit. Nancy said she would like to connect local snowshoe/winter activity businesses with this event, to help teach people how to use snowshoes.

When we asked Nancy about connecting Windsor Lake Trail more downtown, or help make it a visible destination point, her immediate response was to make more parking available for this trail during the warmer seasons (May through October). She also suggested better presence of brochures in the downtown area, by putting them in hotels like the Porches and the Holiday Inn in North Adams. For future activities of this trail, in an effort to involve the community, she suggested organized trail walks for all four seasons. She pointed to MCLA as a major advertiser; they could put events on their website, and help organize specific times for trail walks. Winter Carnival at Williams College directly coincides with North Adams' Winterfest, and she envisioned an exciting, collaborative weekend at Windsor lake with snowshoeing, chowder cook-offs, and ice sculptures. She thought having shuttles from schools to the trail would be a good idea for an event such as this.

Later in the interview, we asked Nancy her thoughts on maintenance of the Windsor Lake Trail. Currently, Windsor Lake Trails and the other two trails are informally maintained. In an ideal world, she said that because this trail in particular is owned by the city, the Parks and Recreation department should have staffing ability to maintain these trails. In a more realistic approach, volunteers and clubs, formed by the Windsor Lake Commission, could help maintain these municipal trails. Currently twice a year, MCLA has community service days. Every year they have picked Windsor Lake and its trails as a volunteer destination.

Dog-walking as a popular activity along Windsor Lake Trails was also brought up in the interview. Nancy believes during the off-season dogs can be allowed on the trails if they are on leash. But for the safety of campsite users and trail users, dogs should not be allowed when Windsor Lake is most in use during the warmer summer, spring, and fall months.

Potential Funding Source

The Recreational Trails Program as a part of the Massachusetts department of Energy and Environmental Affairs is currently receiving applications for a grant that will be given out to twenty five to forty projects with awards ranging from two thousand to fifty thousand dollars or more depending on the project.

Because our project is involving an urban population that has a potential for increased access to recreational opportunities, we are optimistic in our ability to appeal to the goal of the grant program. In addition, the goals of our project include improving signage, especially in order to increase use by city residents, introduction of maps especially at the trailhead, increase in trail maintenance, as well as the potential construction of new trails in order to link the existing trails to points of interest and other trails, like the case of Noel Field's connection to the proposed Greylock Market.

All of these improvements are linked to the revitalization outlined in the Vision 2030 plan, which hopes to increase investment in pedestrian public spaces in the downtown. Increasing trail usage by increasing signage and connectivity to popular downtown businesses are crucial to these improvements. In particular a trail that is ADA accessible will be vital in creating outdoor recreational opportunities for the afin and disabled persons in the North Adams community.

Overall Recommendations

Promotion of Trails

Public accessibility of these trails can be improved first and foremost through the creation and distribution of comprehensive trail maps that include information like

length, difficulty, and potential activities. In our case studies of other municipal trails, they provided this information online, easily printed, or in brochures which in our case could be distributed at downtown stores, Mass MoCA, MCLA, and the Chamber of Commerce. Trail signs visibly accessible to visitors upon reaching a trailhead is also a necessity, as well as trail markings in more complicated trail networks like Windsor Lake. The creation of these maps, their publication online, and trail signs will require a financial investment by an organization.

Websites specific to all three trails are linked to the Explore North Adams website, but only minimal information currently exists about each of them. Within the listing of “Things to do” all three trails are options, but no information exists about how to get there or what the trails are like. In particular, the Noel Field website does not even mention that there is a riverside walking trail. For each, information about distance or uses are lacking. When our maps are complete they would enhance the online presence of these trails on the North Adams website. Online information is key especially to for new-users and tourists wanting to learn more about the trails.

Community Involvement

Holding planned community events at each of the trails will be important in increasing their usage, as well as visibility. Each trail has different amenities to offer. For example, Windsor Lake is used for its water activities and playground area, that can be easily be expanded upon by increasing usage of the trails. Snowshoeing events would also be beneficial to make Windsor Lake more used during the winter months. Family-day walks along the Cascades trail is another potential, or monthly guided historical walks along the Noel Field Walk. These events will hopefully attract a diverse group of

people from the community.

Universal Accessibility

Information collected during this trail assessment about the three trails that we focus on will have more information regarding their compliance with universal design tenets. Our recommendation is for a full accessibility audit of the Riverbank at Noel Field. Our field-work has demonstrated that Noel Field seems like the most feasible trail site to make handicap accessible. At Noel Field, the many parking lots on the site include some wheelchair parking spaces, but also has many gates. These gates are owned by the city, and will likely come down as part of the pilot project of the Hoosic River Revival, allowing Noel Field to become a beautiful 4 mile loop. At Windsor Lake there are wheelchair accessible parking spaces, but most of the areas available for outdoor recreation are grassy and uneven. The trail system itself is wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair, but has roots and rocks that would make it very difficult for patrons in a wheelchair to use it. The Cascades trail is definitely not handicap accessible and it is largely unfeasible to make it so, just by nature of its river crossings, its entrance, and the roots and rocks along the trail.

Maintenance

Consistent maintenance of these trails is also a substantial technical consideration when we plan for the future use of our three trails. If certain trails are not already maintained by a certain group or organization, partnering with an organization will be extremely important to ensure that any improvements that are made now can be sustained. The trails at Windsor Lake and The Cascades are in need of improvements

right now, such as removal of roots and rocks or an infill of ruts in the walking path. In our individual assessments of each trail, we provide specific recommendations for these improvements in detail. There is also the issue of parking at the Cascades Trail.

Conclusion

Windsor Lake Trails, the Riverbank at Noel Field, and the Cascades Trail are municipal trails in North Adams with much potential for improvement. Through the course of this planning project, our main goal was to provide greater access to outdoor recreational activities and improve community health and wellness in North Adams, Massachusetts. Based on our groundwork assessment, interviews with community members, and overall analysis, this goal relies upon increased visibility and accessibility of these trails, the promotion of these trails with planned community events, and increased connectivity with other trail networks and points of interest in the North Adams area.



Brook along Windsor Lake Trails

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