

Proposed Bachelor Brook – Ferry Street Accessible Trail Loop Phase I
Joint NOI/MESA Review
July 7, 2016

Project Description:

The Town of South Hadley in cooperation with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and Mount Holyoke College are seeking to develop an accessible non-motorized loop trail at the Bachelor Brook Conservation Area on Ferry Street in South Hadley.

The trail as currently proposed involves an accessible trail, six feet wide and 1,000 feet long, identified as a solid yellow line on the attached map. This portion of the trail is to be built by excavating to mineral soil, filling with compacted graded base, and adding 3/8" minus graded aggregate for a hard packed surface. The remainder of the proposed loop trail would be a mowed path around the perimeter of the field, and leading to a scenic viewing spot at an elevated spot along Bachelor Brook. The viewing area will consist of some vista pruning of trees to create a clearing.

A small parking lot for approximately 10-15 vehicles will be constructed in the same manner (excavating below grade, adding compacted aggregate to stabilize the surface), and is also identified on the attached map.

Existing Conditions:

The proposed location for the Phase I accessible trail is around the edge of an existing hayfield, currently leased to a farmer for annual hay harvesting. On the west side of the field, the proposed trail alignment is within the existing edge between the mowed field and the tree canopy (see photos 1 and 2). This area is currently dominated by sumac and invasive shrubs, particularly multiflora rose (see photos 3 and 4). Oriental bittersweet vines are growing vigorously on the trees and in the canopy along the bank of the Connecticut River (see photos 3 and 4). In the Fall of 2015, this edge zone was brush hogged by the local farmer (see photo 2), and currently has strong re-growth of vegetation. The north, east and south sides of the field along the proposed trail alignment are existing hayfield grasses, mowed at least once per year. No trees will be cut along the proposed trail alignment.

In the north, the trail leaves the field and travels north into the woods to an overlook spot at the edge of the wetland bordering Bachelor Brook, then loops south through the woods and back to the field. At this time, the trail in the north to the wetland overlook and down the east side of the field is proposed only as a footpath – mowed along the field edge, and flagged as a natural surface trail through the woods. Thus, no aggregate or other construction materials will be used for the trail in these area. Some clearing of brush will be needed at the field edges to create an opening for the trail through the dense vegetative growth along the edge of the field.

The area in the south end of the field at the proposed parking lot is currently part of the mowed hayfield, consisting of a mix of grasses. The eastern half of the parking lot is within the delineated 100' wetland buffer zone.

Photo 1 Looking south along west edge of field. Proposed trail alignment on right in shrubby edge.



Photo 2 Looking north along west edge of field. Proposed trail alignment on left between edge of field and tree line. Shrubby edge had been recently mowed (before snow fall).



Photo 3 Looking west toward the Connecticut River at area of proposed trail. Pink flag is on proposed trail alignment. Sumac is shrub along field edge. Dense Oriental bittersweet vines growing on trees.

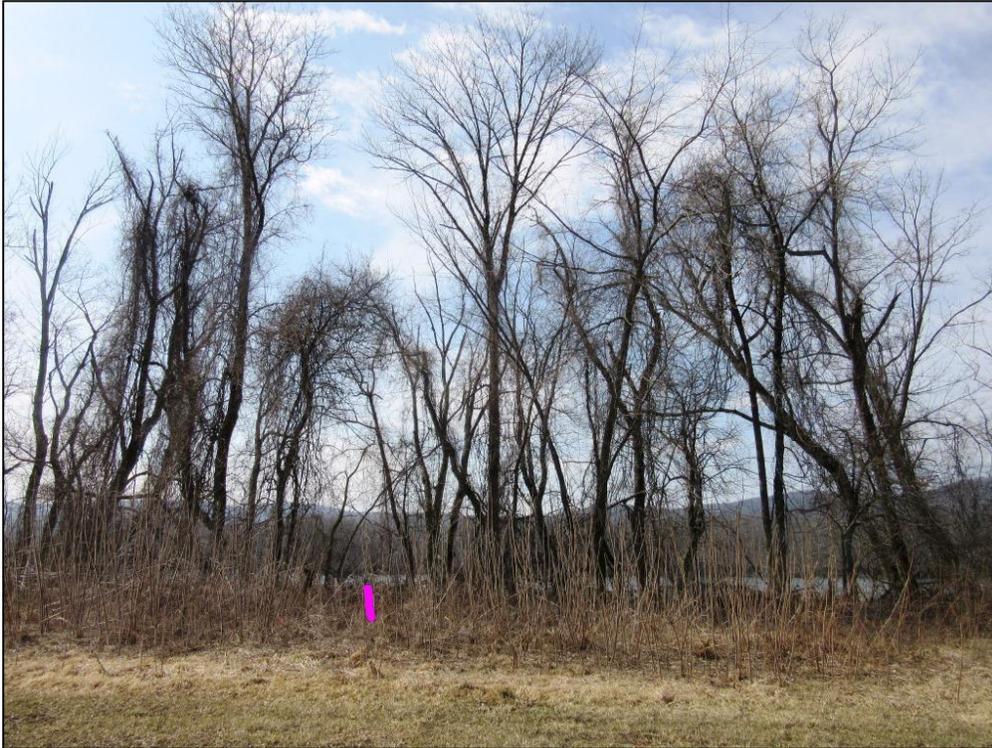


Photo 4 Looking southwest toward the Connecticut River at proposed trail alignment at pink flag in sumac and multiflora rose at edge of field. Oriental bittersweet vines in tree canopy in background.



Other Agency Review and Approvals:Massachusetts Historical Commission

On June 8, 2016, the Massachusetts Historical Commission issued a letter stating that “no historic properties will be affected by implementation of the project as currently proposed.” The project has been under review by MHC since November, 2014. At the request of MHC, UMASS Archaeological Services performed an intensive archaeological investigation along the proposed trail alignment. Due to the presence of several Native American archaeological sites identified in the northern portion of the field and along Bachelor Brook, the design plans were modified to avoid disturbance of soil in these sensitive areas. Thus, the trail alignment illustrated on the attached map titled “Proposed Bachelor Brook-Ferry Street Accessible Trail Loop Phase I” (May, 2016) accommodates avoidance of the historic resources documented at the site.

Mount Holyoke College Easement

As noted in the Notice of Intent, Mount Holyoke College owns the property at the southern end of the proposed trail where the parking lot, trailhead, and first quarter of the trail are located. The Trustees of Mount Holyoke have granted an easement to the Town of South Hadley (dated July 7, 2015) to “construct and use a trail for public passage by foot, bicycle, ski, and snowshoe...and a parking lot for trail users”.

WMECO Permission

Western Massachusetts Electric Company issued a letter of permission (dated April 14, 2015) to construct a universally accessible non-motorized trail within their right-of-way.