

September 13, 2010

Jonathan Sladek
5247 W Ardmore Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60646

Dear Mr. Sladek:

Thank you for attending the public meeting for the North Branch Bicycle Trail Extension from Devon Avenue to Foster Avenue. We appreciate you taking the time to comment and share your knowledge about the project area with us. Your input has been recorded as part of the record of the public meeting and any preferences you provided will be considered during the ongoing planning process for the project.

As you are aware, we are currently in the preliminary engineering and environmental studies phase, which generally consists of obtaining topographic survey, developing preliminary geometry and evaluating any potential environmental issues not limited to biological, cultural, special waste and archaeological resources. Drainage studies will include floodplain and floodway studies during this phase of engineering.

Your comments and questions are addressed below in chronological order:

1. **Crime:** There is concern in our community that this new trail may increase crime in our neighborhood as it would allow more people to pass closely by our homes, as well as creating an easy getaway route to Forest Glen. Does the FPDCC have any information regarding crime statistics along the bike paths that our community could review? How would the bike trail extension be used by the FPDCC (or Chicago) Police to patrol, deter, and apprehend criminal activity? Specifically, would the FPDCC Police cars be able to drive across the proposed bridge over the railroad tracks? This area between Indian Woods and Forest Glen is a current area which has crime and vandalism problems currently. If the new trail would facilitate better and more frequent patrols in this area, and this could be expressed to our community, I think a lot of the questions about crime could be eliminated.

FPDCC: Over the years, it has been proven that bike trails have reduced crime in residential neighborhoods. Four separate studies conducted between 1979 and 1997 concluded that rail-trails do not increase crime. All four studies found that while some residents were apprehensive about rail-trail projects most did not experience problems after the trail's opening. In fact, many became users of the trail and the majority recognized the trail's economic and health benefits to the community. The Burke-Gilman and the National Park

Service studies both found rail-trails to have a slightly positive effect on property values in adjacent neighborhoods, further testimony to the safety and benefit of rail-trails. For more information, visit http://www.railstotrails.org/resources/documents/resource_docs/Safe%20Communities_F_I_r.pdf

- 2. Bridge:** The proposed bridge will be located in front of my home and we would like more information as to the visual impact this new structure will have. Some questions I have are: Where is the starting point of the elevated structure? What is the extent of earthen embankment prior to the start of the structure? How will this structure overlap with the current access drive for the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District access drive starting at the end of the Ardmore and Indian intersection? Another item of concern is the potential requirement for tree removal to occur for the construction of the bridge. While the bridge is rather narrow, it is assumed that large construction equipment will be required to erect the bridge elements. How will this equipment be located and how many trees will need to be removed to facilitate its construction? Will trees be replanted to replace those removed?

FPDCC: A five-span bridge is proposed over the Metra tracks. Each span will be 150-feet long for a total length of 755 feet back-to-back of abutments. The maximum longitudinal grade along the bridge will be 5% with a minimum vertical clearance of 23 feet over the tracks. Earthen embankment prior to the start of the structure will be approximately 100 feet long. The approximate location of the west end of the structure would begin at a location perpendicular to the east end of the intersection of Indian Road and Ardmore. The earthen embankment approach to the structure would begin at the existing ground elevation and rise to about 10 feet at the beginning of the structure. It is likely that the MWRD access drive will need to be relocated to the end of Rosedale Avenue due to limited access under the trail at the current access drive location. At this stage of the preliminary engineering studies, it is too early to determine the number of trees that will be impacted by the construction of the bridge. However, we are committed to protect and preserve high quality trees to the fullest extent possible. Construction or perimeter erosion fencing will be placed to limit construction access to only what is needed for construction. Based on IDOT's policy on removal and replacement of trees, "All areas disturbed by construction will be restored to turf cover in accordance with "Guidelines for Use of Landscape Items" as appropriate for the project location. All tree and other plants (desirable species only) removed for construction will be replaced on a 1:1 nursery stock basis at a minimum wherever feasible and appropriate. Forested areas or dense stands of trees and shrubs may be replaced with seedling trees on a 3:1 basis where appropriate.

- 3. Construction Traffic:** Will construction traffic be utilizing either Ardmore Avenue or Indian Road during the construction process, or will all access be provided from the Forest Preserve access road? How will the large bridge sections be delivered? Will the construction traffic have any impact to the adjacent neighborhood?

FPDCC: Construction traffic will use the Forest Preserve access road only. Based on the length of the bridge spans and for ease of construction, delivery would likely be in 150-foot long spans. Shorter segments can be done, if necessary, but at a higher cost. Other than noise from construction traffic, no impacts will occur to the adjacent neighborhood since all access will be confined to within the preserve.

4. From an ecological steward perspective, I also have a few comments and questions:
The portion of the proposed path located adjacent to Indian Road will bisect an area of open oak savanna and prairie that is currently under restoration. It will be of great interest to the District to protect as much of this area as possible – and with some extra planning and fencing I think this could be accomplished. The goal would be to limit the area of disturbed ground from construction equipment, avoid the removal of any and all oak trees, transplant select plants prior to construction, and to replant disturbed areas with appropriate native plants. The stewards of the North Branch Restoration Project could work with the District's ecologists in this effort. Of question is the exact location of this path. At what point could we walk the location to determine the exact extent of the impacted area? What area will the soil embankment cover? How will this be landscaped? Can fencing be installed to protect certain areas during construction? Within the restoration area, can new trees be planted to 'replace' those that are removed?

FPDCC: All effort will be made to avoid this oak savanna and prairie area currently under restoration. One of the options we are exploring is to utilize a portion of the existing parking lot for the trail, thereby avoiding the restoration area completely. As the planning progresses, we can work with you and the District to determine the best alignment for the trail taking all things into consideration. As for fencing, it will be part of the plans throughout the project to limit erosion from the construction area as well as to limit the area that the Contractor will be allowed to disturb. Replacement trees can certainly be planted within the restoration area as needed and requested by the District and IDOT.

Should you have any questions, or desire additional information, please contact me at (708) 771-1355, or David Landeweer of URS at (312) 577-6479.

Very truly yours,

Pam Sielski
Project Manager