**CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

**STATE HIGHWAY DESIGN**

**REPORT OF MEETING**

**PROJECT NO.:** 109-173 Farmington Canal Heritage Trail – Phase 1

**DATE:** June 22, 2021 **TIME:** 07:00 p.m.

**LOCATION:** Live Stream via Microsoft Teams and YouTube Live Stream

**SUBJECT OF MEETING:** VirtualPublic Information Meeting

**ATTENDENCE:**

* DOT State Highway Design:

Scott Bushee – Project Manager

William Hogan – Project Engineer

Ahmed Kadhim – Project Designer

Michael Julian – Transportation Engineer 1

Joey Zou – Transportation Engineer 1

* DOT Right-of-Way Coordinator; Matthew Geanacopoulos
* VHB Consultant Support from Gap Closure Study; Mark Jewell
* Approximately 44 public viewers attended on Microsoft Teams and 33 on the YouTube Live Stream

The purpose of this meeting was to present to the public, Phase 1 of the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail from Town Line Road to Norton Park in the Town of Plainville.

**PRESENTATION**:

The meeting went live online at about 6:45 p.m. The presentation began at 7:00 p.m. Mr. William Hogan of the Department of Transportation (Department) welcomed everyone to the live event and reviewed the event format. Mr. Hogan introduced the Department representatives and Mr. Robert E. Lee, Town Manager, Town of Plainville. Mr. Hogan stated support for the project has been received from the Town Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, Plainville Historical Society, Plainville Economic Development Agency, and the Plainville Chamber of Commerce.

The presentation covered the following items:

* Proposed trail location through the Town of Plainville and limits of Phase 1; Town Line Road to Norton Park.
* Project Purpose and Need: To close the final remaining 5.3 mile gap in the Connecticut section of Farmington Canal Heritage Trail (FCHT) through the Town of Plainville. The FCHT in the State of Connecticut is also part of the East Coast Greenway.
* Gap Closure Study: The proposed trail alignment through the Town of Plainville was developed through the study. The study concluded in 2018.
* Project Phases: The project team explained that the Plainville section of the FCHT is to be completed in three phases to allow for construction continuity over the next five (5) years. The limits and construction timeline for each phase were reviewed as follows: Phase 1 is from Town Line Road to Norton Park with anticipated construction start in 2023, Phase 2 is from Route 72 to Northwest Drive with an anticipated construction start in 2024, and Phase 3 is from Norton Park to Route 72 with and anticipated construction start of 2025.
* Phase 1: The Plainville section of the FCHT will start at Town Line Road, connecting to the Southington Trail which is anticipated to start construction start in 2022.The proposed trail will then travel north, parallel to the Farmington Canal utilizing an elevated berm known as the towpath and will connect to Norton Park. This section is approximately 4,000 feet in length and will be one hundred percent (100%) off-road.
* Project Overview: A section of boardwalk is proposed to traverse an area of wetlands and two pedestrian bridges are required to traverse hydraulic breaches in the towpath. The boardwalk will be 13 feet and 3 inches wide. The proposed multi-use trail will be a 12 feet wide paved surface with two-foot grass shoulders on both sides. In addition, benches, historical signs, and kiosks are proposed along the trail.
* Historic Stakeholder Consultation: The project team is currently coordinating with the Plainville Historic Society to develop the historic signs proposed along the trail.
* Construction Schedule and Cost: Anticipated construction start is spring 2023. Total construction cost is approximately $4.25 million, completed with State funds and Federal funds.
* Right-of-Way Impacts: Seven (7) partial property acquisitions and two (2) total acquisitions are proposed for this project. The Right-of-Way process was summarized by Mr. Matt Geanacopoulos, Project Right-of-Way Coordinator.
* **PUBLIC COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS:**
* Following the presentation, a Questions and Answer session was held for meeting attendees to communicate with the project team. A total of one hundred six (106) questions and comments were received through MS Teams chat window, project e-mail and voicemail and of which, fifty-two (52) offered support for the project. Supporting comments were received from many Town of Plainville residents, as well as residents of nearby communities. In addition, strong support for the project was received from local organizations and bike advocate groups. It was noted during the question and answer session that, if requested, the project team would meet on site with residents individually to discuss any questions, comments, and concerns. Questions, comments, and responses from the meeting are summarized below:
* Several questions were received to the following effect: How will the safety of abutting residents be addressed under this project? Will privacy fencing or plantings be placed along the trail to address security and privacy needs of nearby residents? Will funds for privacy fencing be included in the project?
	+ Response: Split rail wood fence is proposed at certain locations along the trail; this fence typically keeps users on the trail. Privacy fencing is not planned for this project; some vegetation for reforestation is proposed near the parking lot. In addition, primarily the trail will be adjacent to the Farmington Canal which provides a physical barrier between the trail and private properties.
* What is the status of the local petition sent to Governor Lamont’s Office, requesting the Phase 1 alignment be moved off the old mule haul path?
	+ Response: The Department is not aware of the petition status and the inquiry should be addressed to the Governor’s Office or a State Representative.
* Is any Town or State owned land going to be cleared and used for additional structures along or directly off of Norton Trail?
	+ Response: Seven (7) partial property acquisitions and two (2) total acquisitions are anticipated for this project. For construction of the trail and parking lot, required total acquisitions properties currently have no houses or residents. Most of the trail will be on land owned by the Town of Plainville. Norton Trail is beyond the Phase1 limits and trail design north of Norton Park has not been finalized.
* Questions and comments received about the parking lot were to the following effect: Trail users will park along Redstone Hill and Hollyberry Lane when the parking lot is full. The trail is a linear park and not a singular destination, a parking lot should not be included in the project. Will the trail impact existing parking for the pool in Norton Park?
	+ Response: A parking lot is needed at this location because the nearest trail parking lots in the area are small and currently used to their full capacity. The two (2) nearest lots are in the Town of Southington. The design team investigated other locations for the parking lot before determining the current location is most suitable for the project. The design team believes the Phase 1 parking lot with fifty-three (53) spaces will benefit the community, reduce impact on Norton Park and provide an increased level of safety.
* A few questions were received to the following effect: Will cameras be installed along the trail for safety? What hours will the trail be open and who is responsible for trash pickup and maintenance after construction? Is an estimated maintenance cost available?
	+ Response: Security cameras are not being considered for this project and the Town will have full maintenance responsibility and will determine hours of operation after construction completion. Maintenance will consist predominantly of tree trimming. The design life of the trail pavement is anticipated to be twelve (12) to fifteen (15) years.
* Several questions and comments were received inquiring about the Phase 2 and 3 trail sections.
	+ Response: It was noted this meeting time is dedicated to Phase 1 and questions and comments related to Phase 2 and 3 would not be addressed. The two (2) other phases will have public information meetings at a later date.
* A few questions and comments were received to the following effect: Were neighborhood residents surveyed in development of the trail alignment? Instead of placing the trail along people’s backyards, were other alignment alternatives considered for this project?
	+ Response: The trail alignment was determined through the extensive Gap Closure Study. Residents can find more information on the study at the following website [www.gapclosurestudy.com](http://www.gapclosurestudy.com). The study was led by a steering committee consisting of Town of Plainville, Capitol Region Council of Governments, CTDOT, CTDEEP, Town of Southington and City of New Britain. Other stake holders and residents participated in the workshops which examined several factors such as safety connectivity, ROW, and environment, to determine a preferred location for the trail.
* The Farmington Canal is full when it rains, how will the trail impact the flow capacity of the canal? Has this impact been taken into consideration?
	+ Response: The proposed design maintains the integrity of the towpath to the most extent practical. In areas where the towpath is narrow, fill adjacent to the towpath is predominantly along the opposing side to minimize impacts to the Canal. The two (2) proposed bridges will also keep the current canal flow along its existing path.
* Can trail shoulders be stone dust instead of the proposed 2 feet grass shoulders?
	+ Response: The design team will discuss utilizing stone dust shoulder material with the Town. It was noted stone dust connectivity would be intermittent due to the proposed bridges and boardwalk sections.
* Why is it necessary to use eminent domain for this project?
	+ Response: The Department follows laws and rules when it comes to land acquisitions for projects. The eminent domain process is only used when discussions between property owners and the Department agents do not result in agreement over the proposed just compensation. It was noted that an overview of the Right of Way process was covered in the presentation.
* $4.25 million for a trail seems expensive, what is the reason for the high cost?
	+ Response: The proposed project includes about four thousand (4,000) feet of multi-use trail, a parking lot, and a long driveway which requires a lot of asphalt; in addition, a long section of boardwalk and two (2) pedestrian bridges are proposed.
* Can the parking lot surface be pervious to minimize runoff?
	+ Response: A pervious parking lot will be considered by the design team. Rain gardens and median islands have been used previously with success for infiltrating runoff and the design team will try their best to incorporate green and environmentally sensitive options.
* Are there plans to install a traffic light or a raised crosswalk for the trail crossing at Town Line Road, where traffic volumes and speeds are high?
	+ Response: A traffic light is not considered at this point; our design team prioritizes safety and appreciates any concerns and feedback. Safety at this crossing is to be reviewed further by the design team.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:00 p.m.