

Upper Charles Trail Project

Frequently Asked Questions #1

March 17, 2022

Introduction

The Upper Charles Trail Committee (UCTC) was charged by the Select Board to develop a plan for the Upper Charles Trail in Hopkinton from Milford to Ashland. In summary, their charge requires the UCTC to develop a plan for a multi-use active and passive recreational path that will incorporate the Hopkinton Center Trail. The plan shall outline the community's vision for the creation of the path and produce recommendations for the Select Board's consideration that align with the aspirations of the community and include 2 or 3 route options one of which is located on the west side of Hayden Rowe.

The UCTC shall continue to gather input from as many Hopkinton residents as possible.

This FAQ is intended to present the most common questions the UCTC has received to date since kicking off their public outreach program at their Public Meeting held at the Senior Center on December 8, 2021, to present a proposed alignment for the Upper Charles Trail from Milford to Ashland.

Many other questions were asked that are not specifically included in this FAQ. A response to all questions received to date during public meetings or emails will be provided under a forthcoming separate document.

The UCTC reviewed a significant number of Trail alignment options before agreeing on the proposed alignment that was presented at the December 8, 2021 meeting.

Two reports completed by the Conway School for the UCTC in 2015 were used as the basis for which the UCTC further evaluated numerous alignment options. Since 2015 the Town has purchased property allowing the UCTC to evaluate additional alternatives through Town-owned properties that were not available at the time the Conway Reports were completed.

FAQ's

1. *Concerns with proposed crossings of Hayden Rowe*

The proposed alignment identified three locations for new formal crossings of Hayden Rowe: address #147 Hayden Rowe, at Granite Street, and one at the entrance to the Hughes Farm Trail (#192 Hayden Rowe). At this stage of the Project (Planning), trail alignments continue to be evaluated based on public feedback and additional detailed evaluations. The UCTC

continues to evaluate this alignment which could ultimately result in one or all of these crossings being eliminated. An alignment that will be ready for the development of construction plans still needs to be designed and permitted.

The UCTC has publicly stated they prefer the alignment not to cross Hayden Rowe. They've proposed these new crossings only as a result of not being able to find alternative routes that did not require easements through, or the purchase of, any private property.

The UCTC will continue to investigate the proposed alignment to address the public concern with new crossings on Hayden Rowe. They will investigate other alternatives that could hopefully reduce the number of new crossings or eliminate them entirely.

There is an existing crossing at EMC Park that has been identified on the proposed Trail alignment but it is not a new crossing. Some comments received indicated a concern with four new crossings of Hayden Rowe, but one of these already exists.

There are strict design and safety guidelines the Town would follow during the design of any trail including the crossing of a public way such as Hayden Rowe. The UCTC completed a safety review of at-grade crossing locations on Hayden Rowe. There were many locations where crossings would not be allowed under certain design guidelines, such as where there are impediments to line of sight for pedestrian visibility and issues with vehicle speeds.

The Town would require the crossing of any public way to be designed to meet and exceed minimum safety requirements.

The UCTC is aware of the history of pedestrian/vehicle accidents on Hayden Rowe. The Police Chief has summarized the findings of two specific accidents that have been raised by the public. For both incidents, the drivers were charged with negligent driving among other charges.

2. Proposed alignment along Hayden Rowe impacting Private Property.

The Town is in the process of locating the property lines along Hayden Rowe to accurately locate the limits of the public right of way (ROW). Locating the ROW property lines will determine if there would be impacts to private property should a shared-use path be constructed within the Hayden Rowe ROW.

To date, the 1905 County Layout Plans of Hayden Rowe have not been found between Grove Street and the Milford Town Line. Information found to date indicates the ROW width could vary between 49.5' and up to 60'. The Town will initiate a property boundary survey if the Layout Plans can not be found.

Draft roadway cross-sections have been developed depicting what the proposed Upper Charles Trail could look like if constructed adjacent to Hayden Rowe and if it would impact

private property. It was determined that if the existing ROW width is 49.5' and if the existing alignment of Hayden Rowe was consistently centered within the ROW, there appears to be sufficient width to build the Trail without impacts to private property. However, property line information reviewed to date indicates that the existing alignment of Hayden Rowe is not centered within the ROW, but shifts from one side to the other within the ROW. In order to construct the Trail without impacting private property, the centerline of Hayden Rowe would need to follow the centerline of the ROW. This would require Hayden Rowe to be reconstructed.

Further discussions are required to determine if the Town would support a roadway reconstruction project. Reconstruction would be more costly than constructing a shared-use path along the existing alignment of Hayden Rowe. But, the reconstruction of Hayden Rowe could address long-standing public concerns with safety and speed on Hayden Rowe.

The UCTC prefers not to impact private property and has gone to great lengths to evaluate other alignments when private property was found to be impacted. They will continue to evaluate other possible alignment alternatives to make Trail connections from Center Trail to the Milford Trailhead Parking Lot. The UCTC has stated that impacting private property is an absolute last resort for them.

3. *Including the Trail within the Irvine/Todaro Properties.*

When Town Meeting approved the purchase of the Irvine and Todaro properties by the Town they were to be used for municipal (town and school) uses, including trails.

Although the School Committee recently voted not to support a trail through these properties, the UCTC will continue to evaluate alignment options utilizing these properties. This follows the direction of the Town Meeting vote to purchase these properties.

It is the Town's and UCTC's utmost priority to ensure that all students and the general public are safe. Any UCTC proposed Trail that is adjacent to a school will be coordinated and vetted with the School Department, the Select Board, the public, Town Departments, and public safety officials. Safety design options, including physical or natural barriers, will be reviewed and evaluated for any or all trails, especially those near schools.

The UCTC will continue to identify and evaluate trail options through these and adjacent properties to address concerns raised having to do with proximity to the Marathon School. The UCTC has stated their goal would be to use areas within these properties, property line setbacks, or buffer areas, which are only allowed to be used for the construction of a trail and not impact the placement of future buildings or parking areas. The design process would address safety and parking concerns that have been brought to the UCTC's attention through their public outreach. The design process would include collaboration with the School Committee as an important partner with the Town and the UCTC to evaluate all options for Trail alignments.

4. Use Trails Club proposed alignment instead of the UCTC Alignment.

The UCTC has stated publicly that they initially investigated much of the suggested Hopkinton Trails Club alignment prior to 2017 and ran into private property and neighborhood challenges. The UCTC stated that at that time the private property owners had no interest in discussing easements or any other options to allow the Trail through their property. The UCTC also heard from property owners where the Trail would be adjacent to their property, through their neighborhood, or along public streets. In support of private property owners' rights and taking public input seriously, the UCTC respectfully moved away from this alignment to investigate other options. To date, neither the UCTC nor the Town has received any additional feedback from any private property owner who might have been contacted by the Trails Club or who the UCTC made contact with or attempted to contact years ago that their position has changed.

The UCTC has requested that the Town initiate contact with those private property owners and neighborhoods again to determine if there have been any changes since 2017.

The Hopkinton Trails Club alignment has not yet been investigated as in-depth as the proposed UCTC alignment, especially for wetland impacts and stream crossings. A shared-use path with wetland and stream crossings are very costly to design and construct when following the design standards that the UCTC is using. Shared-use paths that proposed significant impacts to wetland buffer zones can preclude a trail from being permitted as well. As with many sections of the UCTC, this alignment still requires additional evaluation equivalent to the evaluations completed for the UCTC trail segments to determine the overall impacts, challenges, and advantages.

The UCTC had previously investigated at-grade and above-grade crossings (bridge or flyover) of Hayden Rowe between Granite Street and the Milford Town line. The Trails Club option recently presented to the UCTC at their January 19th meeting potentially proposed the use of property outside of Hopkinton. The Town has recently updated the original 2016 evaluation of a pedestrian bridge completed by the UCTC to include the location of a bridge where it was shown as presented to the UCTC by the Trails Club. Challenges face any proposal to include a bridge. The Town is initiating discussions with the Town of Milford to broach the subject in detail at the request of the UCTC.

The UCTC's charge requires them to provide at least two trail alignments, including an alignment to the west of Hayden Rowe so they will continue to listen to all ideas (old and new) in order to meet their charge and present all trail options to the Select Board.

5. *As pointed out in the presentation from the Trails Club, we want to walk and bike in the woods, not use a trail for transportation.*

As stated in the UCTC charge, they are responsible for the development of a plan for a multi-use active and passive recreational path. This multi-use path is not intended to discriminate against any particular user. All users will be welcome.

The current alignment proposed by the UCTC is mostly located in wooded areas.

6. *Hopkinton residents want stone dust trails, not paved trails.*

A private resident informed the UCTC that they conducted their own online survey to see what type of trail users want. They reported that the results overwhelmingly showed users wanted a stone dust surface. Results were submitted to the Town in May 2020.

A recent survey conducted by the Hopkinton Planning Board, presented at a recent UCTC meeting, indicated those who responded to their survey preferred paved sidewalks and trails. In addition, the Fire Chief recently attended a UCTC meeting and noted that a paved trail would be his preference for the purposes of emergency vehicle access. The UCTC is investigating the possibility of developing another survey in an attempt to gather a significant response from the residents of Hopkinton. The goal will be to gather the most representative results from as many residents as possible across all demographics.

The UCTC has discussed different types of trail surfaces, stone dust or asphalt, and both are acceptable. The UCTC will continue to hear public input on the subject. A shared-use path with an asphalt surface would not exclude any user group but at this time no final decision has been made on surface types other than in areas where property restrictions are present. Some town-owned properties have conservation restrictions where the construction of an impervious surface is not allowed.

7. *Suggest pushing off submittal of the Environmental Notification Form (ENF) until all feedback received is incorporated into the plan*

The UCTC voted to delay requesting approval from the Select Board to submit the ENF to the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Office. This decision was based on the public feedback the UCTC received to date.

8. *What, if any, studies have been done to analyze the traffic impact on the EMC Park parking lot and mitigate parking concerns anywhere along the proposed trail alignment*

Traffic studies would be conducted during future phases. The UCTC continues to evaluate future parking areas. They led the effort for the Town to purchase property opposite Granite Street at Hayden Rowe with a goal of providing parking for future trails. In an effort to

connect municipal resources with parking, the UCTC has proposed trail alignments that connect: the Milford Trailhead, College Rock Park, EMC Park, future Center School redevelopment, a new parking lot across from Town Hall, future Marathon Museum, and Hopkinton State Park.

Parking at trailheads, or at the beginning and end of a trail, is desired. To be eligible for State/Federal funding a trail needs to provide connectivity and access (public/emergency) to parking areas. The UCTC is aware of this requirement and will continue to coordinate with the Town to explore all options to increase parking in their evaluation of all trail alignment alternatives.

9. Construction Cost (Stone Dust and Asphalt)

Much has been presented to the UCTC in regard to the cost to construct trails, especially the difference between stone dust and asphalt trails. Yes, stone dust costs less than asphalt when purchasing just stone dust versus asphalt, but it is not a 90% savings. From an overall construction cost standpoint, there is a savings when all other construction methods are exactly the same with the only exception being the use of 4" of stone dust compared to 4" of asphalt when building a Trail.

The costs presented to date by the UCTC for the shared-use path they are proposing to construct are accurate. Where impervious surfaces are allowed the surface is preferred to be asphalt. Where property restrictions do not allow asphalt a stone dust surface or other pervious surfaces could be used. No final decision has been made on surface types. At a minimum, the following requirements will be met for any trail construction the UCTC proposes;

1. Wetland Protection Act (WPA): Wetland Permitting Requirements (local, state, and federal).
2. Hopkinton Public Safety Recommendations will be followed.
3. Public Procurement Law - bidding requirements.
4. Prevailing Wage requirements.
5. Americans with Disability Act (ADA) requirements.
6. Maximize User Safety (Design per recognized standard of safety - prefer MassDOT design guidelines to maximize MA funding opportunities).
7. Be inclusive for all users, where possible, as to not exclude any user group.
8. Professional Construction Oversight - ensure trails are constructed per design plans.

This list is not intended to be all-inclusive, as trails constructed in the woods are expected to have many challenges (including tree removal and stormwater management) that cannot be anticipated during this planning design phase. It is intended to provide the reader with an idea of what requirements the UCTC and the Town will follow for the Trail alignment that is proposed.