



Place: Plainville Town Library
Auditorium
56 East Main Street
Plainville, CT 06062

Meeting Notes

Date: July 25, 2016

Notes Taken by: Andrea Drabicki

Project #: 42201.00

Re: Steering Committee Meeting #2, 3pm-5pm
Farmington Canal Heritage Trail Gap Closure Study and
CTfastrak Connection Study (Study)

ATTENDEES

Name	Organization	E-mail Address
Steering Committee Member		
Matt Blume	Town of Farmington	blumem@farmington-ct.org
Jim Cassidy	Farmington Valley Trails Council / Plainville Greenway Alliance	james_p_cassidy@mac.com
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Consultant Team		
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Mr. Head began the meeting by introducing the VHB team present at the meeting, Andrea Drabicki, Mark Jewell, Dan Burden and Samantha Thomas. He then laid out the reason for the meeting and led introductions by the members of the Steering Committee (SC) present. Mr. Head then reviewed the Objectives of the Study:

1. Close the Gap in the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail (FCHT) through Plainville and Southington
2. Identify a connection to the **CTfastrak** station in downtown New Britain

He then proceeded to review the Vision Statement as crafted and voted on by the Steering Committee:

“The vision for the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail and CTfastrak Gap Closure Study is to connect the communities with a world-class multi-use trail that closes the gap in the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail (FCHT) through the towns of Southington and Plainville with a connection to the CTfastrak station in downtown New Britain. These links will prioritize safety, comfort, and mobility for all users, regardless of age or ability, through cohesive and attractive trails that promote economic and community vitality.”

Mr. Head next provided an update to the scope of work and schedule:

- Project Management (On Going)
- Public Engagement Program (On Going)
- Data Collection / Base Map Creation (Complete)
- Assessment of Existing Conditions (On going)
- Identification of Alternatives
- Implementation Plan
- Final Report

Additional project milestones included:

- Website is up and live: www.gapclosurestudy.com
- Survey #1 is posted on the project website on the Participate page:
<http://www.gapclosurestudy.com/participate.asp> **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**

Mr. Burden then gave a short presentation on bicycle and pedestrian treatments that can be used for closing the gap in these communities. The presentation touched on best practices from around the country and discussed which of these have worked well in other parts of the country. He also noted that people do want choices and that data exists to support the economics of trails and that walkability investments are being considered by people when considering to work and live in a community.

The next topic discussed was the Decision Matrix for the Study. Mr. Head stated that VHB had developed a draft of the matrix and provided the draft to the CRCOG for review and comment. Mr. Head indicated that the matrix would be used to objectively evaluate alternatives against each other and that the matrix criteria needed to be definable and measurable. The decision matrix criteria developed by VHB include the following:

- Connectivity
- Safety
- Off Road/On Road Alternative
- Environmental

- Property Impacts
- Cost

The alignment with a higher score will ultimately be determined as the “preferred alignment”. Each community will receive their own preferred alignment. The weighting scale will be from zero (0) to ten (10), whereas;

Zero (0) – Of low benefit or high negative impact

Ten (10) – Of high benefit or low negative impacts

Mr. Head then reviewed each of the decision matrix criteria beginning with connectivity. Mr. Head stated that connectivity would be measured by the number of schools, recreational areas, commercial locations, and cultural resources within a ¼ mile of a proposed alignment.

- 1.) Schools
- 2.) Recreational facilities – Parks, Linear Trails, Open Space
- 3.) Commercial Locations – Town/City Center, Neighborhood Centers, Technology Parks, Office Parks
- 4.) Cultural Resources – Museums, Historical Locations, Religious Institutions, Cultural Centers

There was general consensus on the list of items to be reviewed for connectivity (above), however, there was one comment regarding how many people (population) would be within ¼ mile of an alternative. It was noted that population would be added to the matrix.

Mr. Head continued with the matrix criteria, indicating that the safety criteria would evaluate the number of traffic conflicts along the trail, specifically, how many commercial driveways and how many intersections are crossed, as well as, how many mid-block road crossings there are. Several members of the Committee requested that security be added as a criteria for the trail. The security of the trail will be a key factor in getting people to use the trail, which will in turn improve the security by becoming self-policing, e.g. “eyes on the trail”. Mr. Head noted that this had been discussed by the study team but was not added because it can be a very subjective rating criteria. He noted that for example the type of facility that one person feels secure on can be very different than another. However, based on the SC input the consultant team will work up a definition so that security can be added to the matrix.

The next criteria discussed was how much of the proposed alignment would be off road or on road. Several members of the Committee noted that it would be helpful if definitions and images were provided for the facilities so that everyone had a clear understanding of what was being discussed. Mr. Head indicated that he would provide the necessary information so everyone would have a clear understanding of the various types of treatments. The general consensus from the Committee was that an off road facility would be the most sought after type for this project. It was also suggested by the committee that three categories of trail types could be used: on-road, off-road, and multi-use trail.

Another item that was discussed was the comfort and aesthetics of the trail and how this should be assessed. A discussion ensued as to what could comfort be rated on, several items discussed were: how close to a high traffic road the facility was, how much shade was provided, are there amenities along the trail such as benches, viewing

areas, etc. Mr. Head noted this would be identified through other criteria such as on-road / off road facilities, connectivity and others, but it would be stressed throughout the process that the trail has to be designed to be a comfortable facility, e.g. shade trees, etc.

Mr. Head next presented the environmental criteria. Trail alternatives will be evaluated on wetland impact (percentage of trail within wetlands), impact to the 100-year floodplain (percentage of trail in or out of the floodplain), negative affect on cultural resources, impacts to hazardous materials locations, and additional impervious surface (pavement) being added. There was a good discussion of which items if any from this criteria should be included at all in the initial rating of alternatives, the reason behind this was that any impact can be mitigated in some fashion. Several members thought that the Environmental Criteria should be taken out until more detailed assessment will be performed after the alternatives are reduced to 2 or so for each gap closure (Plainville and New Britain). It was finally decided to leave this criteria in, but make the weighting for this not as important as other criteria for the initial round of alternatives.

Mr. Head went on to discuss the property impact criteria. Property impacts will be evaluated on whether the property being impacted is publicly or privately owned. This impact is being defined as the center line of the trail being within 10 feet of a property line. Discussion ensued over this criteria regarding if it should be included for the first round of cuts of alternatives. It was noted that an alternative with a large amount of property impact may be a non-starter for the communities where these reside and that it should be left in. It was also noted that this impact would be a simple "this many properties may be affected" not a detailed assessment of the impact.

The last criteria to be evaluated is the cost. Each alignment developed will include the preparation of a conceptual design/construction cost estimate which will be developed from recently bid CTDOT projects. Included in the costs will be an estimate for the annual maintenance cost of the proposed facility. Several members of the team brought up examples of maintenance issues and indicated that sample maintenance cost data from existing trails is available. Several committee members noted that cost is the least important part of creating a "world class" facility and felt that cost should not be reviewed as part of the initial alternative selection. After discussion it was determined to leave this in because the cost of the project could have a large impact to a smaller community that does not have a large tax base / budget to cover a potential match to State or Federal funding. Similar to the Environmental Criteria is was decided to leave cost in but give it a lower weighting than other criteria.

At this time Mr. Head invited Dan and Samantha from Blue Zones to "interview" the Steering Committee to garner their insight. Each Committee member was asked a few questions about their community or organization to garner their thoughts on the study, and their answers were recorded for the consultant team's use. The initial question asked was "What are the issues in your communities that we should be aware of?" other follow-up questions were asked that varied based on the discussion. Some of the repeated messages that the Committee Members relayed were: the importance of interfacing with transit; designing for the condition you want to see instead of the existing conditions; being mindful of how the public will react to potential impacts near their homes; that on-road improvements may be necessary (it was suggested that the intersection of Routes 10 and 372 be analyzed); and that CTDOT had to use many techniques to engage the harder to reach populations in New Britain. Other comments from the Committee included, this is a facility for transportation / commuting not just recreation; the facility can improve the quality of life by allowing people to be active; an off-road facility is preferred; aesthetics

of the facility will be critical to get people using it; CTDOT is open to many new facility types for bicycle and pedestrian projects; a network of facilities is desired that allows users to go out their front door and get to the facility instead of taking their car to the trail; many of the users are using the existing facilities out of necessity (don't own a car); this project has the ability to revitalize the communities / have a positive economic benefit. This is a brief summary of the responses from the Committee, a full summary of information collected from this interview will be published in the Discovery Week report.

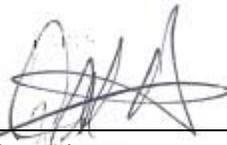
Next Steps

- VHB to finalize the Decision Matrix based on feedback received from the Steering Committee and additional information gathered during Discovery Week.
- The Study Team will develop the weighting for each of the decision matrix criteria and forward for review.

Statement of Accuracy:

- We believe these minutes accurately describe the discussion and determinations of this meeting. Unless notified to the contrary within 5 business days, we will assume all in attendance concur with the accuracy of these notes.

Notes Submitted by:



David Head

Notes Approved by:



Tim Malone

Distribution: Attendees
Project File 42201.00