

MEMORANDUM

TO: Park Advisory Commission

FROM: Colin Smith, Parks & Recreation Services Manager

DATE: December 15, 2020

SUBJECT: Resolution to Approve Routing a Paved Portion of the B2B Trail Through Barton Nature Area

This memorandum and resolution requests the Park Advisory Commission (PAC) approve routing a paved, accessible segment of the Border-to-Border (B2B) trail through Barton Nature Area.

In 2007 the City Council passed resolution R-07-516, designating the Barton Nature Area as a Preserve. The resolution also stated the City would “not build on, develop, or grade parkland designated as Preserve for any purpose”. In 2016 the City Council stated that at times there are identified capital improvement needs and projects that are generally acceptable to improve ecological diversity, environmental conditions, water quality, and other community benefits. This was a result of a proposed water quality construction project at Dolph Nature Area for the benefit of First Sister Lake. Subsequently, in 2016 the City Council amended resolution R-07-516 to allow construction in areas designated as Preserves as determined by the PAC.

In 2018 PAC recommended approval of a Letter of Intent outlining a partnership between the City of Ann Arbor Parks and Recreation Services, the Washtenaw County Park and Recreation Commission (County), and the Huron Waterloo Pathways initiative (HWPI) to collaborate on an update to the 2005 feasibility study for the Bandemer-Barton Pedestrian Tunnel. This partnership enables the City, County, and HWPI to combine resources towards the goal of creating this highly desired non-motorized connection that can ultimately serve residents of Ann Arbor, Washtenaw County, and the surrounding region as part of the statewide Iron Belle trail. The goal of this project is to assess the feasibility of constructing a pedestrian underpass tunnel beneath the MDOT railroad near Bandemer Park, as well as an accessible trail connecting the new underpass to, and through, the Barton Nature area.

A public meeting was held in 2019 to gather initial public input and a second public meeting was held in December of 2020 to share the results of the draft feasibility study report, along with proposed routes for the paved section of B2B trail through Barton Nature Area. The 2020 public meeting had over 70 attendees and included opportunities for questions & comments from the public, as well as several polls to gather feedback from attendees. The poll results are included in the attached meeting

summary but show overwhelming support for both the pedestrian underpass tunnel and the paved extension of the B2B in Barton Nature Area. Additionally, the City received several emails from the community regarding the project which also largely demonstrated support.

The proposed B2B trail segment through Barton Nature Area would consist of an 8-10' wide accessible paved pathway that would closely follow the existing main trail alignment, but with some adjustments to preserve natural features and maintain safe sight distances for trail users. The rest of the existing trail network in Barton Nature Area will remain unpaved, natural surface trails. Additionally, the design team has identified an unpaved trail extension that would provide an alternative route to the B2B for park users.

The project team worked closely with Natural Area Preservation (NAP) to identify ecologically sensitive areas and ensure that the trail alignment minimizes environmental disturbance and impacts. NAP has evaluated the recommended trail alignment and are generally supportive of the layout. Should the project progress detailed design, NAP staff will continue to be involved in review and comment as the project moves forward and NAP feedback will be incorporated throughout construction.

Staff request that PAC approve paving a segment of the B2B trail through the Barton Nature Area as shown in Exhibit A. The paved trail would only be constructed if the pedestrian underpass tunnel connecting Barton and Bandemer has secured funding for construction.

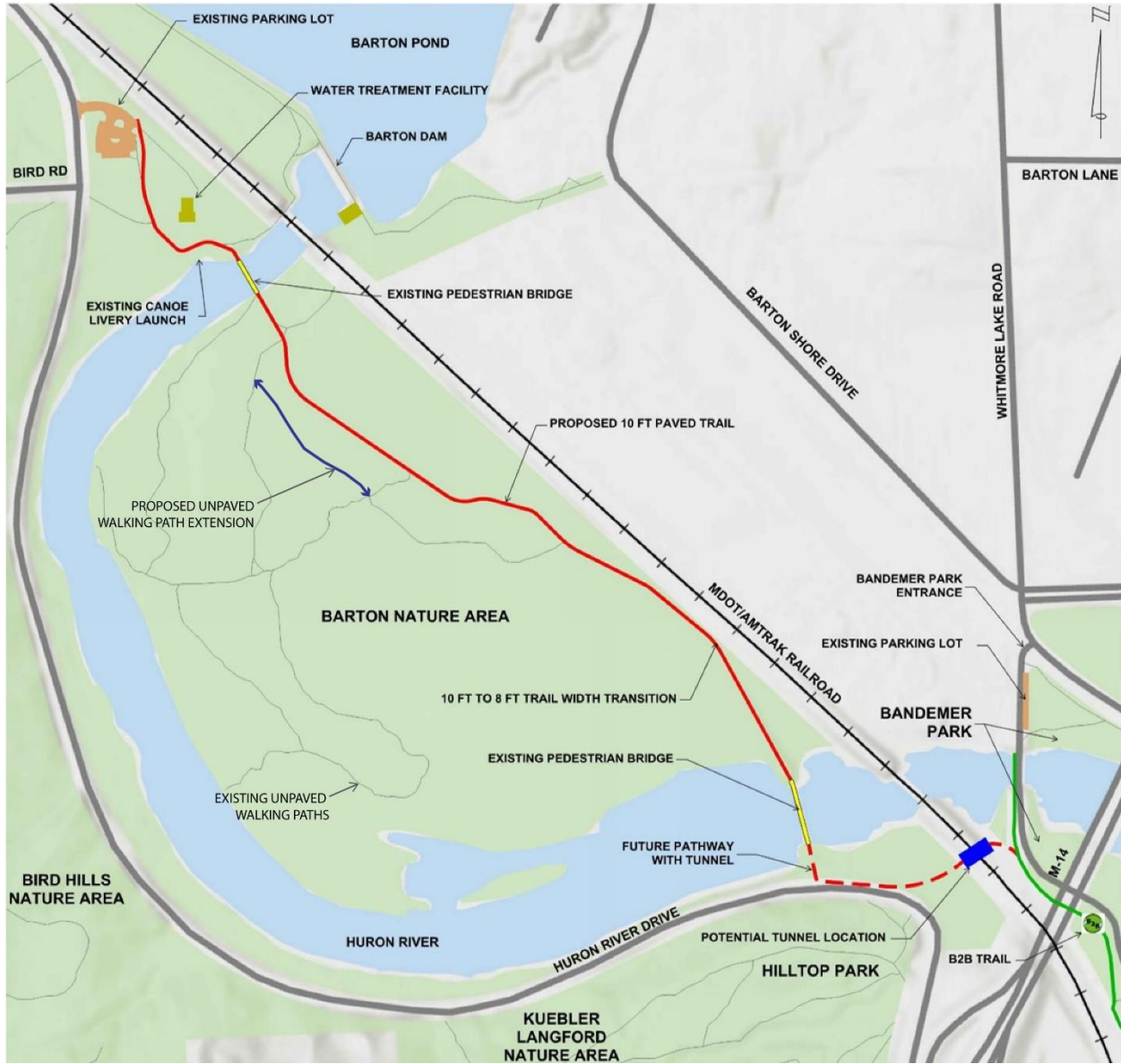


EXHIBIT A: PROPOSED BORDER-TO-BORDER TRAIL ALIGNMENT THROUGH BARTON NATURE AREA

RESOLUTION TO APPROVE ROUTING A PAVED PORTION OF THE B2B TRAIL THROUGH BARTON NATURE AREA

Whereas, In 2007 the City Council passed resolution R-07-516 that designated the Barton Nature Area as a Preserve;

Whereas, In 2016 the City Council stated that at times there are identified capital improvement needs and projects that are generally acceptable to improve ecological diversity, environmental conditions, water quality, and other community benefits;

Whereas, In 2016 the City Council amended resolution R-07-516 to allow construction in areas designated as Preserves as long as the proposed improvement will improve ecological diversity, environmental condition, or water quality as determined by the Parks Advisory Commission (PAC);

Whereas, Resolution R-07-516 states that "Trail maintenance, trail development, and recreational and educational activities that the Natural Area Preservation program finds do not negatively affect the ecological resources of the Preserve are allowed."

Whereas, The feasibility study has identified a preferred alignment for the paved portion of the B2B trail through Barton Nature Area;

Whereas, The rest of the existing trail network in Barton Nature Area will remain unpaved, natural surface trails.

Whereas, The feasibility study identifies the desire to provide unpaved walking path alternatives across Barton Nature area where practical;

Whereas, Natural Area Preservation staff have reviewed the proposed alignment for the paved B2B trail and generally support it; and

Whereas, The value of a paved, accessible portion of the B2B trail through Barton Nature Area is predicated upon the construction of an accessible pedestrian underpass tunnel connecting Barton Nature Area to the paved accessible B2B trail portion in Bandemer Park,

Resolved, That features in the Barton Nature Area identified for protection by NAP are protected during the course of the project and that NAP is consulted during detailed design and construction;

Resolved, That unpaved walking path alternatives across Barton Nature area are constructed where practical;

Resolved, That construction of a paved portion of the B2B trail through Barton Nature Area would only be constructed if the pedestrian underpass tunnel connecting Barton

Nature Area to Bandemer Park has secured funding for construction;

Resolved, That the layout and location of the paved portion of the B2B trail generally follow the placement as detailed in Exhibit A and any significant deviation from this will require PAC review and approval; and

Resolved, That PAC approve construction of a paved portion of the B2B trail through Barton Nature Area as shown in Exhibit A.