



BOSTON
NATURAL AREAS
NETWORK

August 10, 2010

Commissioner Richard Sullivan
Department of Conservation and Recreation
251 Causeway St, Suite 600
Boston, MA 02114

Attn: Joseph Orfant, Director of Planning and Resource Protection

Dear Commissioner Sullivan:

On behalf of the Neponset River Greenway Council, we would like to offer our comments on the proposals for the extension of the Neponset River Greenway Trail.

The Neponset River Greenway Council (NRGC) is a 16-year-old volunteer group of residents from the Lower Neponset communities of Dorchester, Mattapan, Hyde Park, and Milton, who meet monthly to work for a revitalized Neponset River corridor with a continuous biking and walking trail and new and renovated parks connecting Blue Hills to Boston Harbor. Boston Natural Areas Network (BNAN) convened the Council in 1994 and serves as the staff for the Council. A self-selected group of residents, the Council has provided insight and guidance to both MA Department of Conservation and Recreation and to BNAN as the Neponset River Greenway progressed from a vision in 1994 through planning, design, construction and operation of Pope John Paul II Park since 2001 and the 2.5 mile multi-use trail to Central Ave in Milton in 2003; to Neponset Landing Park in 2006 and to the first phase of the Neponset Esplanade open this year from 7 Brush Hill Road in Milton along Truman Parkway to Martini Shell in Hyde Park.

Over these 16 years, MA DCR has conducted dozens of public meetings while the Council met monthly in our meetings that are open to all. This vigorous community process has provided important input for the highly successful Neponset Greenway enjoyed today by local and regional park users. We would like to commend DCR for its commitment to ensuring opportunities for community involvement in the planning process for this newest section of the Greenway, especially through the two site walks the agency hosted and staffed in July. We look forward to continuing this community process in a timely way through the planning of the Neponset Trail Extension and into design and construction.

The Neponset Greenway as built to date by MA DCR provides important, new access to acres of publicly owned land, previously inaccessible and inhospitable for recreation and the enjoyment of nature. Areas once abused with illegal dumping and other activities now are active, safe, beautiful and well used by residents of all ages. As well demonstrated by this past experience, the Council believes that these recreational and environmental benefits will continue to the Neponset Trail Extension as planning proceeds and concludes.

Boston Natural Areas Network
62 Summer Street • Boston, MA 02110-1008 • p (617) 542-7696 • f (617) 542-0383 • www.bostonnatural.org

Working toward a greener city.
Boston affiliate of The Trustees of Reservations

In our 16 years of experience advocating for and using the Neponset Greenway, we have witnessed the importance of this trail for families, seniors and people with small children, walkers, runners, skiers, and a multitude of other users in addition to cyclists. The Neponset River Greenway is a multi-use trail that is enjoyed for recreation much more than it is for bicycle commuting. The Neponset Greenway offers incalculable good to the community in that it is a place to reap health benefits, connect with neighbors, and enjoy the natural setting of the Neponset River.

The priorities of the Neponset River Greenway Council for the continuation of the Neponset River Greenway are as follows:

- Alignment of the Greenway with ease of access to the proposed new section of trail in both communities abutting the river, especially to the communities north of the river which have yet to enjoy direct connection to the parkland resources of the Neponset River Greenway
- The greatest proximity and/or visual access to the Neponset River that archaeology and topography will allow
- Emphasis on enhancement of Ryan Playground with its very popular spray pool, playground, athletic facilities, restroom (the only public restroom in a park from Paul's Bridge to Boston Harbor) and canoe launch as a destination park for this section, much like Martini Shell and PJPII Park are for their sections
- An alignment that provides safe connection to the segments of the existing trail, easterly at Central Avenue and westerly at 7 Brush Hill Road

With these stated priorities, none of the five trail extension options currently presented by MA DCR meet the goals of the Council. The Neponset River Greenway Council proposes a "sixth option" for completing the Greenway in a way that is equitable, safe and enjoyable. This "sixth option" is based on Option B, which begins at Central Avenue on the south side and crosses the river at the most eastern end of Ryan Playground and continues on the north side to the Mattapan MBTA Station, with the important addition of three necessary features:

- An at-grade crossing over the tracks of the Mattapan Square MBTA Station
- A trail spur to Desmond Road in Mattapan
- A trail spur to Capen Street in Milton

The at-grade crossing at the Mattapan Square MBTA Station avoids dangerous conflicts with traffic on busy River Street in Mattapan Square. This at-grade crossing is a critical element of this new option. MBTA, MA DCR and the community must work together to develop a safe, workable crossing that provides safety for transit operators and users and for trail users. The Desmond Road spur adds more Mattapan access. The Capen Street spur allows Milton access to the trail, minimizes neighborhood impact, and does not bring extra traffic through the neighborhood. Please see attached rough sketches for further elaboration on this recommended option.

The Neponset Greenway Council is committed to working with MA DCR, MBTA and residents to insure that the at grade crossing at the trolley tracks at the MBTA Mattapan Station becomes a viable safe element of the alignment.

Regardless of the alignment selected, the Council feels very strongly that the safety of the physical connection between this new trail and the recently constructed Brush Hill Road/Truman Parkway trail must be a priority. We request that MA DCR work with the City of Boston to study options for a safe, more direct trail connection between these two sections of trail at the busy Mattapan Square intersection.

In addition, this past spring residents on both sides of the river expressed concerns regarding public safety of the extension section. The Council feels it is important for MA DCR to initiate a security and public safety planning process for the new trail that includes representation by all the public safety organizations with jurisdiction including MBTA, State Police, Boston Police, Milton Police, Boston and Milton EMS and DCR Rangers. This public safety process is similar to the process undertaken in 1998 by BNAN and MA DCR prior to the construction of the first section of trail. The development of a public safety plan enabled the multiple agencies with jurisdictions on and along the Greenway to come together, share information and develop recommendations. As a result, the 2.5-mile Greenway trail from Tenean Beach to Central Avenue is safe, secure and used with confidence by the public.

After 16 years of dedication, the Neponset River Greenway Council is pleased with the progress made bringing the vision of a recreational trail and new parklands to the banks of the Neponset River. With the planning and construction of this remaining missing section, we look forward to bringing access to new neighborhoods and expanding access for others to enjoy the Neponset River Greenway.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments and input on this important proposal.

Sincerely,

Valerie Burns
BNAN President

On behalf of the Neponset River Greenway Council, August 4, 2010 Meeting:

Barbara Baxter, Hyde Park
Bob Boushell, Dorchester
Martha McDonough,
Readville
Doug Mink, Roslindale
Lee Toma, Milton
Bob Schmaltz, Dorchester
Peter Jackson, Milton
Marjorie Jeffries, Milton