

**CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF
TRANSPORTATION REPORT OF PUBLIC
INFORMATIONAL MEETING**

**State Project No. 0109-0176
Phase 2 of Farmington Canal Heritage Trail (Route 72 to Northwest Drive)**

**July 20, 2023 – 7:00 p.m.
Virtual Public Information Meeting**

ATTENDANCE:

Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT)

Michael Calabrese, P.E.	Highway Design - Transportation Division Chief
Scott Bushee, P.E.	Highway Design - Principal Engineer (<i>Presenter</i>)
Stephen Hall, P.E.	Highway Design - Project Manager
William Hogan	Highway Design - Project Engineer (<i>Presenter</i>)
Shayni Shukla	Highway Design - Project Designer (<i>Presenter</i>)
Chris F. Luongo	Highway Design - Project Designer
Shiv Patel	Highway Design - Project Designer
Matthew Verry	Highway Design - Landscape Designer
Matthew Geanacopoulos	Rights-of-Way - Coordinator (<i>Presenter</i>)

Town of Plainville (Town):

Michael Paulhus	Town of Plainville - Town Manager
Mark DeVoe	Town of Plainville - Town Planner

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this meeting was to present the preliminary design of State Project No. 109-176, *Farmington Canal Heritage Trail Phase 2 - Route 72 to Northwest Drive* in Plainville, to the public. This project is the second of three phases aimed at closing the final gap in the Connecticut section of the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail (FCHT). This meeting was held virtually using Zoom and live streamed to YouTube. A public viewing option was made available at the Town of Plainville Public Library.

PRESENTATION:

A formal presentation began at 7:00 p.m., led by Mr. William Hogan. Approximately 38 people attended the virtual meeting, including residents, property owners, stakeholders, and local Town officials. In addition, approximately 20 people attended the virtual viewing session held at the Plainville Public Library.

The presentation was primarily delivered by Mr. William Hogan and Ms. Shayni Shukla which covered the purpose and need of the project, project location, existing conditions, proposed design, project cost and schedule, and Right-of-Way needs. Mr. Michael Paulhus expressed support for the project and closure of the 5.3-mile gap of the FCHT in the Town of Plainville. Information on the Rights-of-Way process and procedures was provided by Mr. Matthew Geanacopoulos.

The presentation covered the following items:

- Title VI Civil Rights details and Title VI flyer
- Zoom Tools - How to use Q&A Chat and Captioning
- Email and Voicemail Comment Submission Instructions
- Section 106:
 - A finding of “No Adverse Effect” under Section 106 compliance is anticipated for Project No. 109-175, Phase 1 of the FCHT in Plainville
 - A finding of “No Historic Properties Impacted” under Section 106 compliance is anticipated for Project No. 109-176, Phase 2 of the FCHT in Plainville
- Project Location: All three phases of the FCHT closure project are in the Town of Plainville, extending for 5.3 miles from Town Line Road to Northwest Drive. The subject of this virtual public informational meeting is Phase 2, which is approximately 2 miles in length and runs from Route 72 to Northwest Drive.
- Purpose and Need: The purpose of this project is to construct a multi-use trail known as the FCHT through the Town of Plainville in order to close the final gap in the Connecticut section of the trail. The Connecticut share of the FCHT consists of a 56-mile section connecting New Haven through Suffield, terminating at the Massachusetts border. The entirety of the Connecticut trail section is either complete, in construction, or approaching final design, excluding the remaining 5.3-mile gap in the Town of Plainville.
- Proposed Design: The Phase 2 alignment extends from Route 72 to Northwest Drive and will expand the utility of the Farmington Trail Section constructed in 2017. The proposed design will consist of an approximately 2.1 mile off roadway alignment with a 12-foot-wide paved path. Along with the paved trail, the former Exit 1 deceleration lane on Route 72 will be extended and a proposed tunnel constructed under Route 72. Two pedestrian bridges in Tomasso Nature Park will be replaced, to provide sufficient width for the multi-use trail. From the nature park, the trail continues north onto Carling Technologies, keeping the existing tree buffer intact between the residential homes on Perron Road. The trail then continues north onto a vacant lot, which is part of Robertson Airport, before crossing Northwest Drive at the Spring Lane intersection. A raised crosswalk and Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons are proposed at this crossing to increase safety. Additional traffic calming measures on Northwest Drive include a 3-foot centerline lateral shift, reduction of travel lanes from 12 feet to 11 feet and shoulder width reduction from 5 feet to 3 feet. The existing 8 feet paved side path will be widened to a 12-foot paved trail and provide an 8-foot grass buffer between the vehicle traffic and trail.
- Impacted Properties & Rights-of-Way (ROW) Process: It was noted that 12 partial property acquisitions are anticipated for the trail project. The majority of acquisitions are from Town-owned properties. Three partial property acquisitions including minor easements are anticipated on residential properties. A partial acquisition and easements are required on a large commercial property, known as Carling Technologies. The ROW and property acquisition process was described in detail by Mr. Matthew Geanacopoulos.

- **Construction Schedule:** Construction is anticipated to start fall 2025 and last two seasons. During tunnel and deceleration lane extension work on Route 72, temporary ramp closures are anticipated for the on and off ramps at the Route 72 and Route 177 interchange. A temporary alternating one-way traffic pattern will be required for traffic calming and trail construction on Northwest Drive. A temporary construction access road will be needed for the replacement of the Pedestrian Bridges in Tomasso Nature Park.
- **Construction Cost:** Estimated Construction cost is \$15.5 million which utilizes both State and Federal funds. Project features included in the cost:
 - Two miles of paved multi-use trail
 - A 120-foot tunnel with illumination under Route 72
 - Route 72 westbound Exit 5 deceleration lane extension
 - A 50-space parking lot with six electric vehicle charging stations and a restroom facility
 - Two pedestrian bridges in Tomasso Nature Park
 - Traffic calming on Northwest Drive

DISCUSSION (QUESTION AND ANSWER):

Following the presentation, a question-and-answer session was held for meeting attendees to communicate their questions, comments, and feedback to the project team. The majority of attendees expressed their support and recognized the need for the project, with a few adjacent property owners expressing concerns.

- ⇒ Question: Is a traffic light planned at the proposed Route 177 parking lot driveway? Exiting the parking lot and especially taking a left onto Route 177 can be dangerous.
 - Response: The parking lot driveway location has been reviewed by CTDOT Traffic Design and it has been determined that a new signal for the parking lot is not warranted. The volume of vehicles entering and exiting the parking lot was noted to have little effect on the operation of the intersection, which is frequently congested during peak hours. CTDOT understands making left turns in and out of the lot during peak traffic hours could be challenging.
- ⇒ Question: When Phase 1 of the trail project is constructed, will it end south of Route 72 at Bruce Avenue?
 - Response: Phase 1 of the Plainville Trail Network will extend from Town Line Road to Norton Park. Phase 2 of the Plainville Trail Network, which is the focus of tonight's meeting, extends from Route 72 to Northwest Drive. Phase 3 of the Plainville Trail Network will extend from Norton Park to Route 72.
- ⇒ Question: Will bikes be allowed through Tomasso Nature Park if they are not being ridden?
 - Response: Currently, the Plainville Town Council has stipulated that no bikes or pets will be allowed in Tomasso Nature Park. There will be a bike rack available for trail users at the entrance of the park.

- ⇒ Question: What is the proposed start and completion date for Phase 3?
- Response: CTDOT does not have a firm start and completion date for Phase 3, which is still in the planning phase due to multiple alignments being evaluated. There are also environmental challenges along Route 177 to identify an appropriate crossing at the Pequabuck River. Once Phase 3 moves along in the planning phase and there is further coordination with the Town Council, CTDOT will issue an anticipated construction date.
- ⇒ Question: Could the Team explain more about the use of chicanes rather than bollards at some of the intersections?
- Response: One chicane is proposed at the entrance of Tomasso Nature Park for the purposes of discouraging bicycles from entering the park. Bollards are typically used where the trail intersects a roadway and there is a documented history of intrusion by unauthorized cars, trucks, or other unauthorized vehicles onto the trail.
- ⇒ Question: When Phase 2 is completed, will access to the trail be available from Bruce Avenue?
- Response: There is no direct access proposed to the trail from Bruce Avenue at this time. The area between Bruce Ave. and Route 72 is fenced off and proposed to remain as such.
- ⇒ Question: Will Northwest Drive Traffic Calming create issues for AmeriCold truck traffic?
- Response: Traffic calming provides visual cues between drivers and trail users that there is a change in roadway condition upcoming. Elevating the crosswalk and narrowing the road are proven to calm traffic and reduce speed. An elevated crosswalk is like a speed table and is not the same as a hard speed bump. Traffic Calming measures on Northwest Drive should not create issues for truck traffic.
- ⇒ Question: Have you taken into consideration the impacts to the residents on Bruce Avenue? Are there plans to install a privacy fence on Bruce Avenue?
- Response: The CTDOT takes all stakeholders into consideration when proposing and designing a project. There is currently a fence between Bruce Avenue and the proposed trail alignment that will remain in place and preclude access to the neighborhood from the trail. Additionally, a 25-foot vegetative buffer will remain in place to provide privacy. A privacy fence is not warranted in this location.
- ⇒ Question: Please describe the sloped trail from Northwest Drive up to the Airport Property.
- Response: The trail will be benched into the existing tree lined slope along Northwest Drive with a maximum grade of 3.5% to the airport property. This will provide a desirable experience for the trail user, since it is wooded, safe, and off-road.
- ⇒ A suggestion was made to install a 10-foot wide median at the raised crosswalk on Northwest Drive, so trail users only cross one travel lane at a time.
- Response: CTDOT will take this into consideration and investigate further. Utilities, wetlands, and maintenance concerns need to be addressed if a center island is introduced and widens the roadway

footprint. The current proposed design reduces the travel lane and shoulder widths on Northwest Drive, which shortens the crossing length for trail users. Additionally, a Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons and a raised crosswalk are proposed to provide strong visual cues for both the trail users and motorists.

⇒ A suggestion was made to install a bike repair station at the Route 177 Parking Lot.

➤ Response: The trail parking lot will include benches, picnic tables, bike racks, kiosks, and bike repair stations, similar to the parking lot facility built in Cheshire off West Main Street.

⇒ Question: What has the team done to ensure the safety of families, homes, and properties in areas the trail is being placed?

➤ Response: The area around the trail is monitored by local Law Enforcement. The risk of crime on public trails is no greater than any other public space. Trail users should be aware of their surroundings and personal safety. Any suspicious activity should be reported it to local law enforcement.

⇒ Question: There isn't much land between Bruce Avenue and Route 72. How wide is the trail going to be and how far from the existing fence is the trail going to be?

➤ Response: The trail is going to be 12 feet wide. The edge of the trail is proposed to be at least 25 feet from the existing fence line. The purpose is to maintain the existing vegetative buffer between the existing fence line on Bruce Avenue and the trail.

⇒ Question: Will families with pets and/or children on bikes not be allowed to use the trail where it passes through Tomasso Nature Park? Will this be noted prior on the path before reaching this area?

➤ Response: The proposed trail will run adjacent to Tomasso Nature Park and will be fenced off from the interior portion of the park. Trail users that want to explore the interior portion of Tomasso Nature Park will not be allowed to bring pets or bicycles. Pets and bicycles are allowed to remain on the paved trail, however.

⇒ Question: When will Phase 3 designs be ready for consideration?

➤ Response: There are several design elements that need to be considered for Phase 3. Once these elements are determined and a schedule is available the CTDOT will coordinate with the public.

⇒ A suggestion was made to have the flasher button easy to reach when on a bike.

➤ Response: The Rectangular Flashing Beacons will be installed in accordance with the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) and The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines and will be accessible to all users.

⇒ Question: Are there accommodations for wildlife to travel from the wetlands to Tomasso Nature Park? In other words, will the wildlife need to cross over the path to migrate between the park and the wetland areas?

➤ Response: There are currently two pedestrian bridges in Tomasso Nature Park that carry utilities, which will be replaced and enlarged under this project. The bridges provide opportunity for a habitat underneath and

critter crossing between the wetlands and Tomasso Nature Park. In addition, the split rail fence installed along the trail will not prohibit the passage of smaller wildlife.

- ⇒ Question: What about the added noise on Bruce Ave. because of the trail use? In Unionville, they installed a 7-foot privacy fence to block out noise. We want this on Bruce Avenue to buffer the noise.
 - Response: A privacy fence is not warranted in this location due to the distance between the Bruce Avenue residences and the proposed trail, as well as the presence of an existing fence and 25-foot mature vegetative buffer.
- ⇒ Question: Will there be warning signs installed in advance to the Northwest Drive Pedestrian Crossing?
 - Response: Warning signs will be installed in advance of and at the raised crossing in accordance with MUTCD guidelines.
- ⇒ Question: Why is this on zoom and not live?
 - Response: CTDOT switched to virtual meetings when the pandemic started. Most communities were supportive of switching to a virtual meeting format. Virtual Meeting formats produce higher attendance rates and are convenient for families and individuals with limited transportation.
- ⇒ Question: Are there any plans to build behind Julie Road?
 - Response: There is an existing paved path behind the homes on Julie Road, making a connection from the Department of Public Works to Tomasso Nature Park. The proposed trail will sit on top of the existing paved path.
- ⇒ Question: There was legislation in this year's Hartford legislative session regarding the use of eminent domain for trails which did not pass. Was that additional legislative authority deemed redundant or unnecessary?
 - Response: CTDOT has the ability to acquire the property necessary for the construction of this project. The purpose of the referenced legislation was to provide clarity.
- ⇒ Question: Have any considerations been made for the high volume of traffic on Route 177? I imagine it would be difficult to enter/exit the route 177 parking lot.
 - Response: The CTDOT Traffic team has reviewed this location and understands this is a high-volume intersection. However, the added volume from the parking lot is not expected to have significant impact on the intersection. CTDOT understands making left turns in and out of the lot during peak traffic hours could be challenging. This location is on State and Town property and does not impact private properties. The proposed parking lot will have a restroom facility, EV stations, and a kiosk area. The alternative would be to eliminate the parking lot; however, it is a significant enhancement to the trail network and so CTDOT would like it to remain in the project scope.

⇒ Question: Can you go over the details of the parking lot again? Will there be water fountains to fill up water bottles? Will there be EV chargers for cars?

➤ Response: At the parking lot, CTDOT is proposing an identical restroom facility to the one built in Cheshire, which is just south of West Main Street. There will be water fountains, restrooms, running water and electricity at this facility. There will be six EV charging stations installed with the parking lot.

⇒ Question: Have there been any studies done to see what effects construction will have on the wildlife at the Nature Park, especially since it sounds like it will take months?

➤ Response: CTDOT is currently working with Connecticut DEEP on environmental permitting to build these types of facilities. This also includes federal permitting under U.S. Fish and Wildlife. CTDOT understands construction in the park is disruptive, however we are coordinating with DEEP technical experts on the constructability and environmental permitting to ensure species are protected for this project. CTDOT will install additional landscape items in the park, which can enhance the facility for wildlife. The turtle nesting area has been considered, and measures will be taken place in the project to protect this area.

⇒ Question: Can all Plainville Residents be notified by mail of Phase 3 meeting?

➤ Response: When Phase 3 is at a meaningful state in design, CTDOT will coordinate with representatives of the Town to discuss the best course of action to reach out to the community. Similar to the Phase 2 Virtual Public Information Meeting, there will be legal notices posted in newspaper, postings on the municipal website, a posting on the CTDOT website. In addition, property owners within 500 feet of the trail alignment will get direct mailings about the Public Information Meeting.

⇒ Many attendees expressed support for the project and are excited for the completion of the Plainville Trail Network.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:30 p.m. Mr. Hogan reminded everyone of additional resources found on the project website and restated project staff contact information. Mr. Scott Bushee, P.E. highlighted some of the key components of the Phase 2 design and thanked attendees for their thoughtful comments and questions.