



## Bandemer Park Pedestrian Underpass and Border-to-Border trail extension through Barton Nature Area

### VIRTUAL PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY

**Date:** December 2, 2020; 7:00-8:00 p.m.

**Location:** Virtual Zoom Meeting

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**Attendees:** Public: 72

Park Advisory Commission Members: Anne Marsan, Rachel Skyllis

City officials: Michigan State Senator Jeff Irwin, Council Members Lisa Disch and Kathy Griswold, Park Advisory Commission Member Anne Marsan, Washtenaw County Commissioner Conan Smith

City staff: Hillary Hanzel, Kayla Coleman, Adam Fercho, Eli Cooper

Washtenaw County staff: Peter Sanderson

#### Meeting Purpose:

The City of Ann Arbor Parks & Recreation Services Area and the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission hosted an electronic meeting to share updates on the proposed pedestrian tunnel beneath the railroad by Bandemer Park. During this meeting we reviewed project goals, shared the recommendations from the feasibility study, discussed design options developed from community feedback, and reviewed a proposal to extend the Border-to-Border trail through Barton Nature Area. We would like to hear the community's thoughts and additional feedback before the next steps on this project.

**Presentation:** The virtual engagement meeting was recorded and can be viewed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CcOSBE85k1E&feature=youtu.be>

A PDF of the presentation slides is also available for viewing here:

<https://www.a2gov.org/departments/Parks-Recreation/administrative/Documents/Barton-Bandemer%20B2B%20Presentation.pdf>

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## PRESENTATION

The Project Team covered the following information in the presentation:

- Introductions
- Information on using zoom virtual meeting format
- Meeting norms
- Follow-up expectations
- Border-to-Border Trail overview
- Review project goals and public feedback
- Update on consultant recommendations
  1. B2B Railroad Underpass
    - Questions & Answers + Poll
  2. B2B in Barton Nature Area
    - Questions & Answers + Poll
- Next Steps and Final Questions



# THE CITY OF ANN ARBOR PARKS AND RECREATION SERVICES

The following summary is not a direct transcription of the meeting discussion and has been prepared from notes taken during the meeting.

## PROJECT BACKGROUND:

The Border-to-Border Trail (B2B) is a county-wide non-motorized, paved, ADA-accessible trail that is also part of the Iron Belle Trail. The B2B effort is led by the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission in partnership with municipalities, agencies, and non-profits. Over the past couple of years, the B2B has greatly expanded in Chelsea and Dexter, and the pedestrian tunnel/underpass at Bandemer Park represents a critical gap in the trail system. This connection would provide a key linkage from the City of Ann Arbor to the western portions of the B2B, as well as Huron Drive. Additionally, it would improve safety in the North Main Street & M-14 area as well by providing a safe & legal connection between Bandemer Park and Barton Nature Area.

## PROJECT GOALS:

1. Update a previous study of the **feasibility to construct a pedestrian/bicycle underpass** beneath the MDOT railroad tracks.
2. Determine an alignment for **extending the Border to Border Trail** through Barton Nature Area.

## RAILROAD UNDERPASS:

- Six design alternatives considered: 3 alignments and 3 structure types
- Structure Options: Pre-cast box culvert, Rail Bridge, Tunnel liner
- Considerations: Constructability & Permitting, Water table/flooding, Cost

### Preferred bridge/underpass option:

- 16' Wide, pre-cast box culvert
- Recommended option is farthest from the river, perpendicular to the railroad
- Seasonal flooding may occur during high water events depending on engineering details
- Order of magnitude cost opinion: ~\$3.7M

### Railroad Underpass Questions + Comments:

- "I am so excited about the possibility of having this tunnel!!"
- "Looking forward to riding from Stockbridge to Lake Erie in the near future."
- "The tunnel under M-52 is very nice!" (referring to another pedestrian tunnel recently constructed by Washtenaw County Parks.
- "Did you consider crossing at Lakeshore Drive. Continuing north along the east side of Main Street, buying a right-of-way from the business just to the east of the M14, and then tucking in under the M14 ramp? (I don't like this option nearly as much as the tunnel, but I figured I'd ask just so folks are aware.)"
  - Hillary: We did not look at that, and we were told that the at-grade crossing may close in the future. We were also looking at building along the existing Border-to-Border trail alignment for continuity.
  - Peter: We did look at trying to go up at Lake Shore Drive / North Main as suggested, ultimately we think there is a very strong existing presence of pedestrians attempting to cross at the Bandemer railroad location. Confluence of trail location, access off Whitmore Lake Rd, and the connectivity to the loop around Argo Pond, means that that there is always going to be demand at this specific location.
  - "Great answer. Strongly agree with response."
- "What are the barriers to using Barton Shore Drive and putting the tunnel up by Barton Dam? This would leave the natural area alone."



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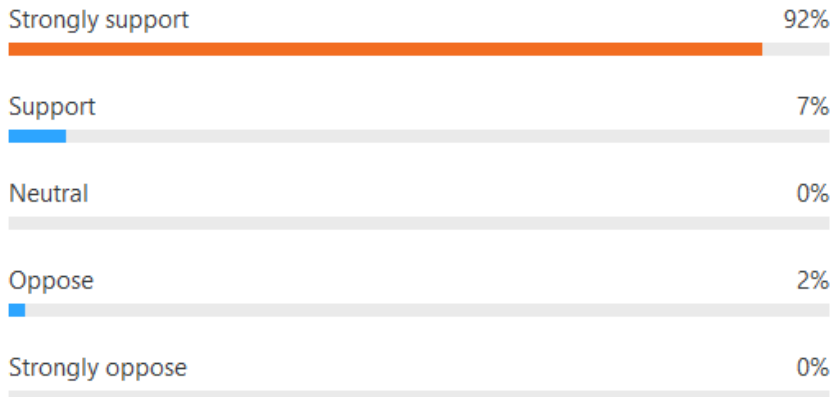
- Peter: “The challenge associated with that is one mainly of distance. The distance through Barton is roughly ½ mile. If you are asking pedestrians to go a ½ mile both ways to make a crossing, they are not likely to make that crossing. ½ mile is less for a biker, but foot traffic is too great of a distance.”
- “Any opportunity to use the corner of land northwest of Bandemer Park bridge (south of Barton Hills property)?”
  - Peter: That is covered with what we just talked about. Based on river hydraulics, based on where we can under, there isn’t much of a cost savings, however it comes with an additional set of regulations in case the dam needs to do an emergency releasing of water.
  - Hillary: Another connection desired is to come up to Huron River Drive. Even if the B2B goes through Barton, it is anticipated that many bikers will want to do Huron River Drive because of speeds.
- “Why is the path from the Bandemer Bridge to the tunnel so indirect? Why north out of the tunnel with a sharp turn right to get on the trail rather than veering to the southeast?”
  - Pete: This is a conceptual alignment at the feasibility stage. One of the things that we need to look at is the grade difference. Where we need to go is lower than the current trail in order to address accessibility we need to add length, which is why we are going up.
- “What is the length of the tunnel?”
  - Peter: the Railroad Right-of-Way is 100’ wide, so that could be the maximum length.
- “The new underpass that Ann Arbor built (Allen Creek Berm Opening) is great except for the 90 degree turn at one end. What lessons do you take from that project?”
  - Peter: Neither of us were involved directly with the Allen Creek project, but we do have the same consultant team. We will look to minimize sharp turns as much as possible.
- “Can you explain more about the challenges of going through Barton Hills instead of Barton Nature Area?”
  - Hillary: We discussed reasons this alternative didn’t move forward earlier. We also don’t own that land and would need to get approvals/easements to go through that land, versus its much easier to coordinate on park land that we own.
  - Peter: We did explore that option and it may have been possible, but it is private property part of the Barton Hills Homeowners Association. Trying to keep the public on public land was important and it is one of the reasons we focused on Barton.
- “Are the two projects necessarily linked? Is the bridge construction dependent on the inclusion of the paved pathway?”
  - Hillary: Yes the projects are closely linked. This is a critical connection for the B2B to connect from Ann Arbor west to Dexter and beyond. We do need approval from PAC to pave the B2B in Barton Nature Area because it is a Nature Preserve with special protections. If for some reason we can’t get that approval, we will need to re-evaluate alternatives for how the B2B would connect from the pedestrian underpass tunnel westward.

### Polling questions and responses:

The team administered several polls throughout the meeting to gauge participants’ preferences. Below are results from the first poll administered related to the pedestrian underpass tunnel.



1. Do you support the City and County continuing to pursue the pedestrian underpass project?



**BARTON NATURE AREA B2B TRAIL PAVING:**

- 8-10’ wide paved trail between the two existing bridges
- All other trails in Barton Nature Area would remain unpaved natural surface trails.
- Worked closely with the City’s Natural Area Preservation (NAP) group to avoid ecologically sensitive areas and minimize impacts.
- Three options for the trail alignment were considered
  1. Follow existing main trail alignment (no adjustments)
  2. **Follow existing main trail alignment (with adjustments) - preferred**
  3. Follow railroad alignment through the prairie
- Benefits of adding the B2B through Barton Nature Area include:
  1. Provide universal access and ADA parking
  2. Improved access for all users (Bicycles, wheelchairs, strollers, rollerblades, etc.) including improved access seasonally when other parts of the park are wet and muddy.
  3. Important connection for B2B between Dexter and Ann Arbor
  4. Provides alternative to Huron River Drive for cyclists
  5. Remove invasive species
- Proposed Trail Alignment is 8-10’ wide paved trail to closely follow the existing alignment of the current main trail with minor adjustments to save trees and maintain safe sight distance.
- Considerations were given to providing park users alternatives to bypass the paved B2B with options such as:
  1. Adding an unpaved footpath connection as part of a natural surface trail bypass route?
  2. Exploring the potential to add a boardwalk connection to the southeast?

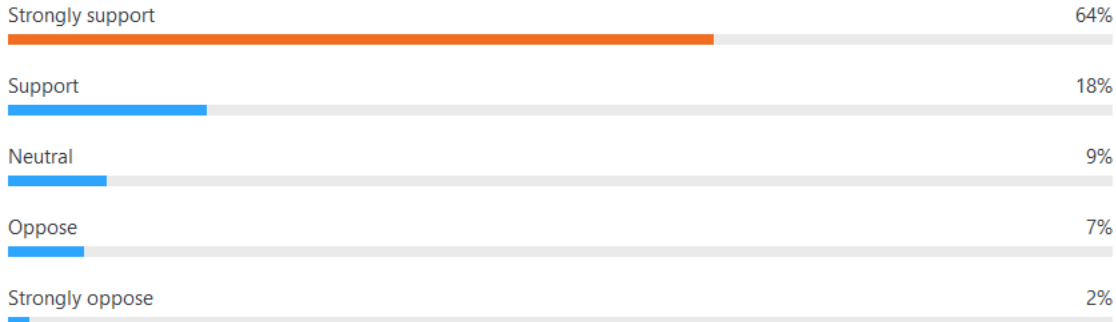
**Polling questions and responses:**

Because of timing constraints, the team paused Q&A after this portion of the presentation and administered polls to gauge participants’ preferences. Below are results from the three polls administered related to the B2B in Barton Nature Area and a poll about the combined project with the tunnel:

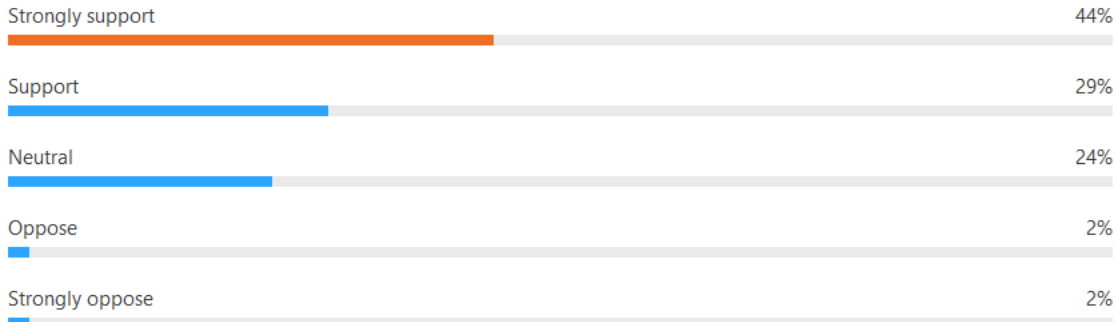


# THE CITY OF ANN ARBOR PARKS AND RECREATION SERVICES

## 1. Do you support paving and extending the Border-to-Border trail through Barton Nature Area?



## 2. Do you support paving and extending the Border-to-Border trail through Barton Nature Area, if an additional footpath were added (labeled '1' on the map)?



## 1. Do you support the city exploring feasibility for a boardwalk bypass(labeled '2' on the map)?





# THE CITY OF ANN ARBOR PARKS AND RECREATION SERVICES

## 1. Overall, are you in support of both the pedestrian underpass and Barton Nature Area trail project?



### Railroad Underpass Questions + Comments:

- “It sounds good to have a path through the Barton Nature Area. But I was wondering if it could be a woodchip path or a non-paved path? Would it be possible to have the B2B not paved – just wood chips? I would strongly support the B2B through Barton Nature Area to save the impacts along Huron River Drive but I find the idea of paving it a bit dramatic.”
  - Hillary: There are several reasons for paving it and one is talking about accessibility and Universal Access. Paved pathway also allows for many types of recreation with other non – motorized users: Bikers, Roller Blade, Strollers. The entire B2B is paved and there are limitations to unpaved trails, so at this time we are not looking into unpaved alternatives for the B2B.
- “Is the B2B paved trail planned to be expanded from the Barton parking lot along Huron River Drive to Wagner and beyond? It seems like a very difficult stretch of Huron River Drive to extend the B2B on. It makes more sense to pave through Barton Nature Area if the trail will be extended off Huron River Drive to the west.”
  - Peter: Yes we do plan on having a full B2B between Dexter and Ann Arbor off road 10’ wide path. Will connect 55 miles through the county.
- “Quick suggestion – Ecological quality map talked about low-lying area getting a lot of flooding. Are you getting push back with people not wanting to lose their walk path. Would it make sense to make a boardwalk path (#2) but run through the middle of the low-lying natural area and consider it the main artery of the B2B for that part of the nature area?”
  - Peter: Generally speaking, the standards that we would have to build that type of boardwalk to in order to be part of the B2B would be cost prohibitive for this section. That type of boardwalk is about 10x more costly than paving the trail.
- “How are we handling the creek crossing between the railroad and the bridge.
  - Pete: there is a small creek on the west side of the proposed tunnel. That is an engineering detail TBD but it will need to be a culvert or a small boardwalk. We will be maintain existing drainage patterns.
- “I just wanted to thank the team, I’m in strong support of the project. Thanks for the work. It will be dramatically safer than the current situation. The one and two options for alternates for the natural trail bypass routes sound great. My only less enthusiastic support that I’ve provided is only related to cost.”
- “Has the option to close this section of Huron River Drive to vehicular traffic been considered (no cars, only pedestrians)?”



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- Peter: We did not look at that as part of this project. However the city explored that maybe about 10 years ago. The process was large, and there was much public opposition to doing that. We took that public feedback opposition and decided not to look further.
- “ADA parking, would we looking at adding new parking lots, or using existing at Bandemer and Barton Parks?”
  - Hillary: This project would look at reconfiguring the Barton Dam parking lot. Make accessible spaces in that lot as current spots don’t meet ADA standards, so we will be adding more ADA parking there. There has not been thought about reconfiguring Bandemer parking lots at this time.
- “Would there be an option for non-ADA access points at shorter distances to the end point of the pedestrian tunnel?”
  - Hillary: I understand this interest is because of the trail alignment shown is not as direct as some users may want. We can look at this during detailed design to consider providing a few different options for connections here.
- “Have you considered a small unpaved trail along the paved trail?”
  - Hillary: The trail that we are showing as #1 on the graphic would be physically separated from the paved trail. We did have previous questions and comments about having an unpaved trail directly adjacent to the paved trail. We looked into that and decided against it, because it will require a greater clearing and disturbance area along the trail and we are trying to minimize ecological impacts. In general, the proposed paved trail standard would include a 10’ wide trail with a 2’ cleared buffer on either side. The 2’ will be a natural surface and may be used for that purpose. We are trying to limit the area of disturbance because this is a nature area with ecologically sensitive areas.
- “Someone had a question about a Sharp turn at the Allen Creek berm tunnel – this was necessary because of the property owners along depot street wouldn’t allow access through the parking lot. That resulted in a fairly high cost due to a required retaining wall. Hopefully this will be more like the river side/north side of the tunnel without as much concrete. One other thing was a mention of wood chips earlier and when the Barton trail was originally put in just dirt it was easier to bike, now with the woodchips it’s impossible.”
- “What about a roundabout at Huron River Drive & North Main Street with cross walk connecting to Bandemer as an alternative?”
  - Hillary: We have not studied that particularly. We looked at what land we have control over (public land/parks) and where there are existing desire lines. The best route that we have found is the tunnel location as shown in the graphic and then going through Barton Nature Area. With the Allen Creek Berm Opening, this provides opportunities for people to come off North Main at Depot and go through Bandemer to this connection. North Main has a lot of constraints and there have been a lot of plans for it but it is under MDOT jurisdiction. This is an area in the parks that we control over and can make this project possible in.
- “Are there any improvements planned for the trailhead west of Barton Dam?”
  - Peter: The main thing we are looking at are minor reconfigurations to make sure we have efficient use of space and that ADA accessibility (including parking) meets standards. There also might be a little bit of work done because this is a drop off spot for Argo and Gallup Canoe Liveries.
- “Any bike or speed markings planned for B2B trails to improve pedestrian safety and comfort?”
  - Peter: County is working on county-wide signage and wayfinding plan and is looking to start implementing next year. Signs are surprisingly complicated, and the county needs to work with all jurisdictions (Chelsea, Dexter, Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti). B2B wants signage that is consistent.
- “After this gap is completed there will still be a gap in the B2B at Maiden Lane and Fuller. Is there any work being done to address this gap?”



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- Hillary: That is not something that we are not actively studying at this time. It is part of the B2B master plan. There is a lot of momentum with Dexter connections, as well as safety issues with the railroad and north main so right now we are focused on this project at the moment. That is an opportunity for a project down the line.

### **NEXT STEPS:**

The Design Team will share the feedback from the community with the Park Advisory Commission at their December 15<sup>th</sup> meeting, where they will also be asked to consider approval of paving within Barton Nature Area.

After that the team will work to secure funding, both from our partners and exploring grant opportunities. WE will also look to initiate detailed engineering and begin the long approvals process with the railroad.

We would expect that construction could begin in the 2022-2024 time frame.