

BEACON HUDSON RIVER TRAIL

PRESENTATION TO BICYCLE PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
OCTOBER 20, 2022

THOMAS WRIGHT, CHAIR, BEACON GREENWAY COMMITTEE



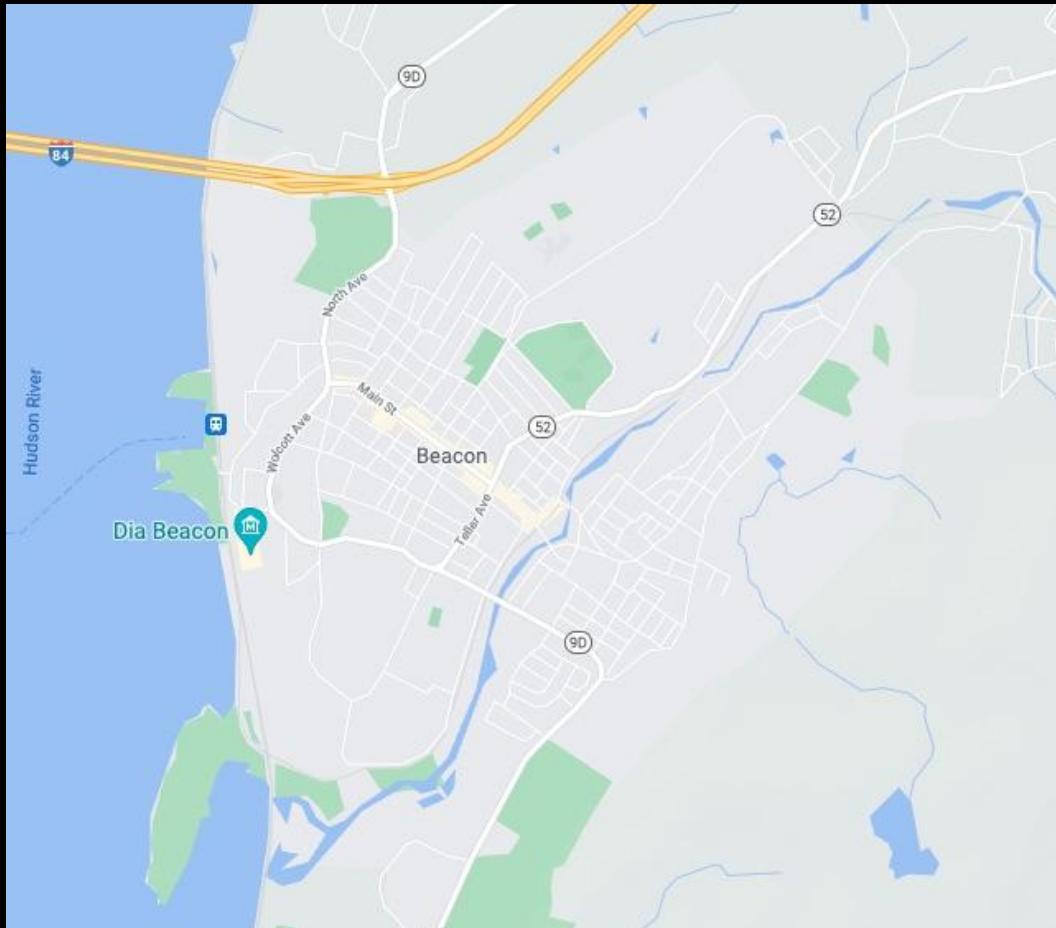
good afternoon. My name is Thomas Wright, I am the chair of the Beacon Greenway Committee. I will be presenting the Beacon Hudson River Trail as well as providing some context regarding its place within local and regional trail initiatives.

I want to start with a bit of background on the committee itself and some of the other projects it has been working to implement.

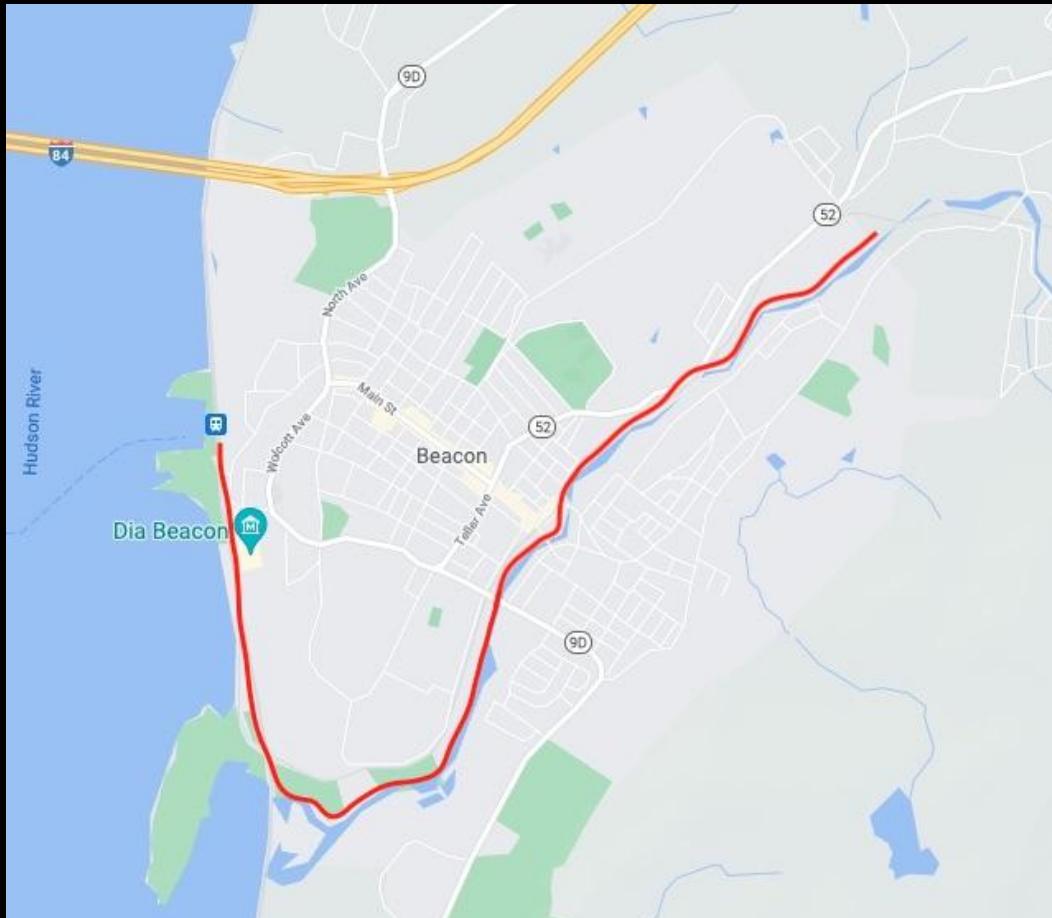
Both longtime residents of the Hudson Valley and new arrivals are discovering that Beacon's walkability and bikeability extends to a large and increasingly interconnected network of trails and regional transportation amenities. This interconnectivity expands our awareness of the natural beauty that surrounds us, and connects us to the communities around us.



Speaking strictly from a transportation perspective, we are close to achieving huge improvements in biking and walking infrastructure in and around the city of Beacon, however, historically, most of the Committee's work has focused on recreational trails.



The Beacon Greenway Committee is a city committee with origins in Community Activism dating back 12 or so years.



The founding members gathered around a shared goal for a continuous trail along the bank of Fishkill Creek from the Beacon MTA train station to the town line of Fishkill.

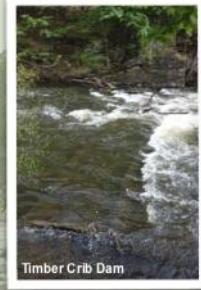


If you know Beacon, you know that Fishkill creek runs through its heart. But in spite of this close proximity, we found that much, if not most of the creek remained inaccessible to the people who lived in Beacon, and those who visited Beacon for its thriving arts and outdoor recreation opportunities.



We also recognized the benefit of linking to existing amenities, such as parks and regional trail networks. Links that make both planned and existing assets even more valuable, by the nature of their connectivity.

Fishkill Creek Greenway & Heritage Trail Master Plan



Through the Hudson Valley Greenway Conservancy, we received grant funds for a master planning process. The Master plan was completed and presented to the city council in June of 2012. The Document was invaluable not only as a planning tool, but as a way to memorialize the Beacon Greenway as a concept for both citizens and City leaders.



Many segments are now complete. Of the remaining incomplete segments, concept plans have been drawn up that describe the greenway gaps in greater detail.

While completion of the Beacon Greenway remains our top priority, we are always looking for opportunities for connectivity, and for creating improvements to existing trails and trail networks.



The potential for interconnectivity exists not only with Beacon trails, but with existing and planned greenway and trail offerings in the region. The Hudson Highlands trail network is just one great example.



The fjord trail promises to be THE flagship trail for the region. A linear park along the Hudson river linking Cold Spring and Beacon, providing recreational and educational excellence while improving access to heavily used Hudson Highlands trails such as Breakneck Ridge and improvements to the dedicated metro north rail stop.

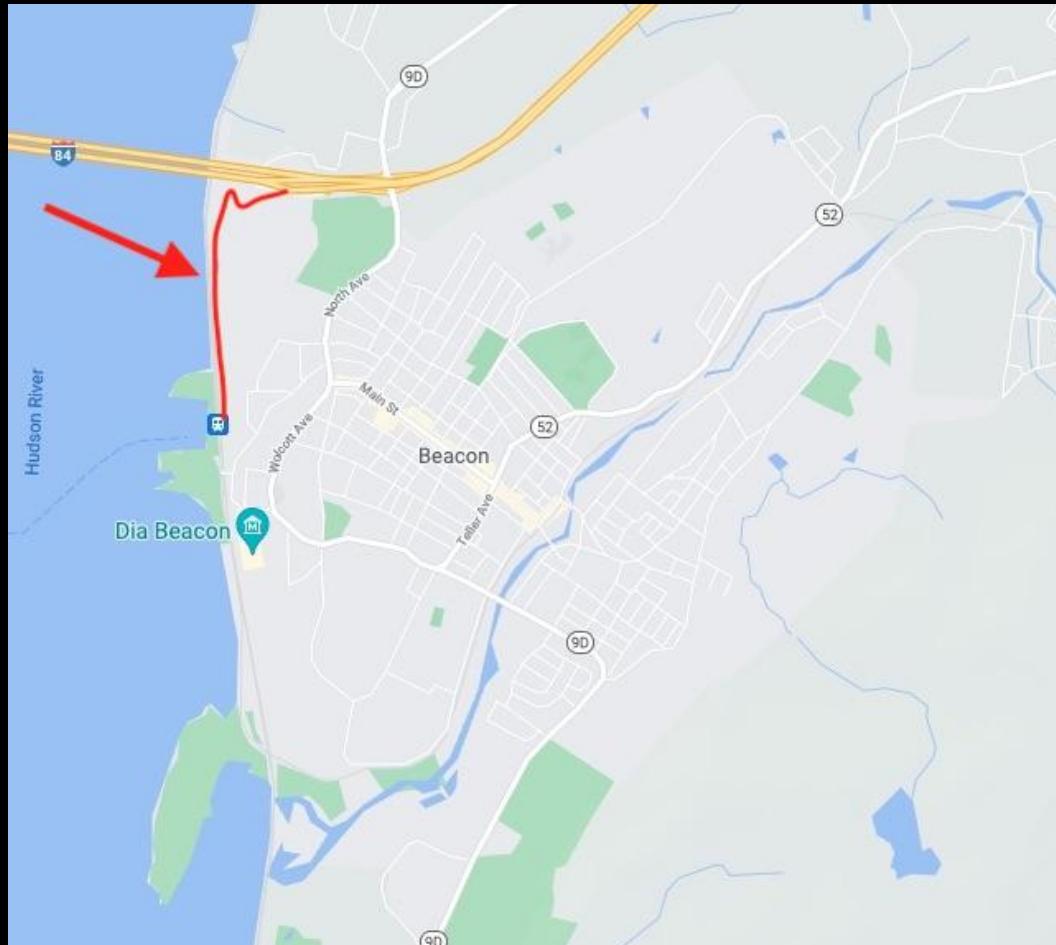


The future rail trail along the Beacon rail line spur is a very exciting development for bike and pedestrian access and linkage. As you no doubt are aware, Dutchess county has named the Beacon to Hopewell Junction Rail Trail as part of its long range transportation plan and the city of Beacon voted this month to support its planning and implementation.



Particularly in terms of bicycle connectivity, the rail trail will be a massive win for the region. It would provide a bicycle amenity that goes way beyond recreation, connecting the key transit link of the metro north station in Beacon with the Empire Trail and several municipalities and local trail networks along the way.

Between our efforts with walking trails, and the potential to connect to major networks such as Hudson Highlands, the Fjord Trail and the Beacon-Hopewell Junction rail trail, Beacon is poised to emerge as a major network hub serving both recreational and mobility uses for cyclists and pedestrians alike.



All of which is a good segue to the main point of my presentation: The Beacon Hudson River Trail



This is a proposed trail that will one day link the pedestrian path of the Newburgh-Beacon Bridge with the MTA Beacon Train station.

In addition to the practical benefits of a walking and biking link between Newburgh and Beacon, the trail passes through a very scenic wooded area, and affords dramatic views of the river and the bridge overhead. In 2014, The Beacon Greenway committee helped secure matching grant funds from the Hudson River Valley Greenway Conservancy to fund a master planning process led by Daniel Biggs of Weston and Sampson, with insight and review from committee members. That plan was presented to the City Council in March of 2017.

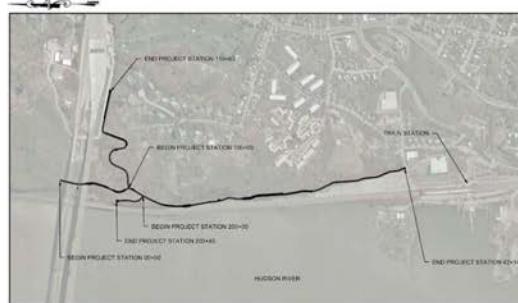


In December of 2017, we again successfully applied for a grant through the Conservancy to prepare preliminary design plans for a pathway and related structures for the trail. It is the result of these efforts that I am presenting this afternoon.

Sheet List Table	
Sheet Number	Sheet Title
C001	COVER SHEET
C001	INDEX PLAN
C101	PLAN & PROFILE STA 0+00 - 9+00
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C301	TRAIL CROSS SECTIONS
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C303	TRAIL CROSS SECTIONS
C304	TRAIL CROSS SECTIONS
C305	TRAIL CROSS SECTIONS
C501	TYPICAL DETAILS
C502	TYPICAL DETAILS
C503	TYPICAL DETAILS

CLIENT

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HUDSON RIVER GREENWAY TRAIL**CITY OF BEACON, NEW YORK****JULY 15, 2020****CONSULTANT**

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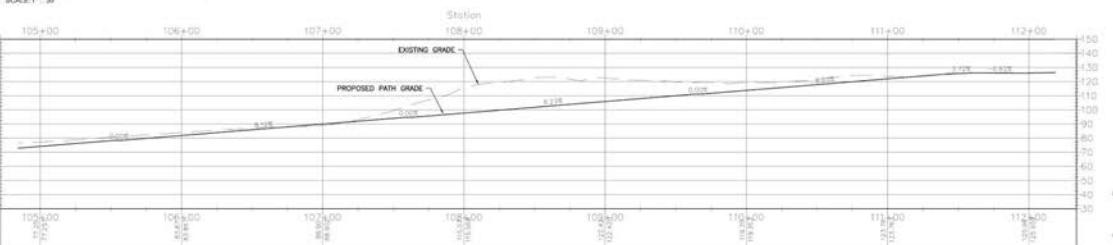
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The plan drawings and design report provide siting and layout for the trail as it works its way down from the elevation of the bridge path, to a scenic bluff overlooking the river, along the MTA rail line to emerge at west main street just a few steps from the Beacon Train station. Key aspects of the design are as follows:

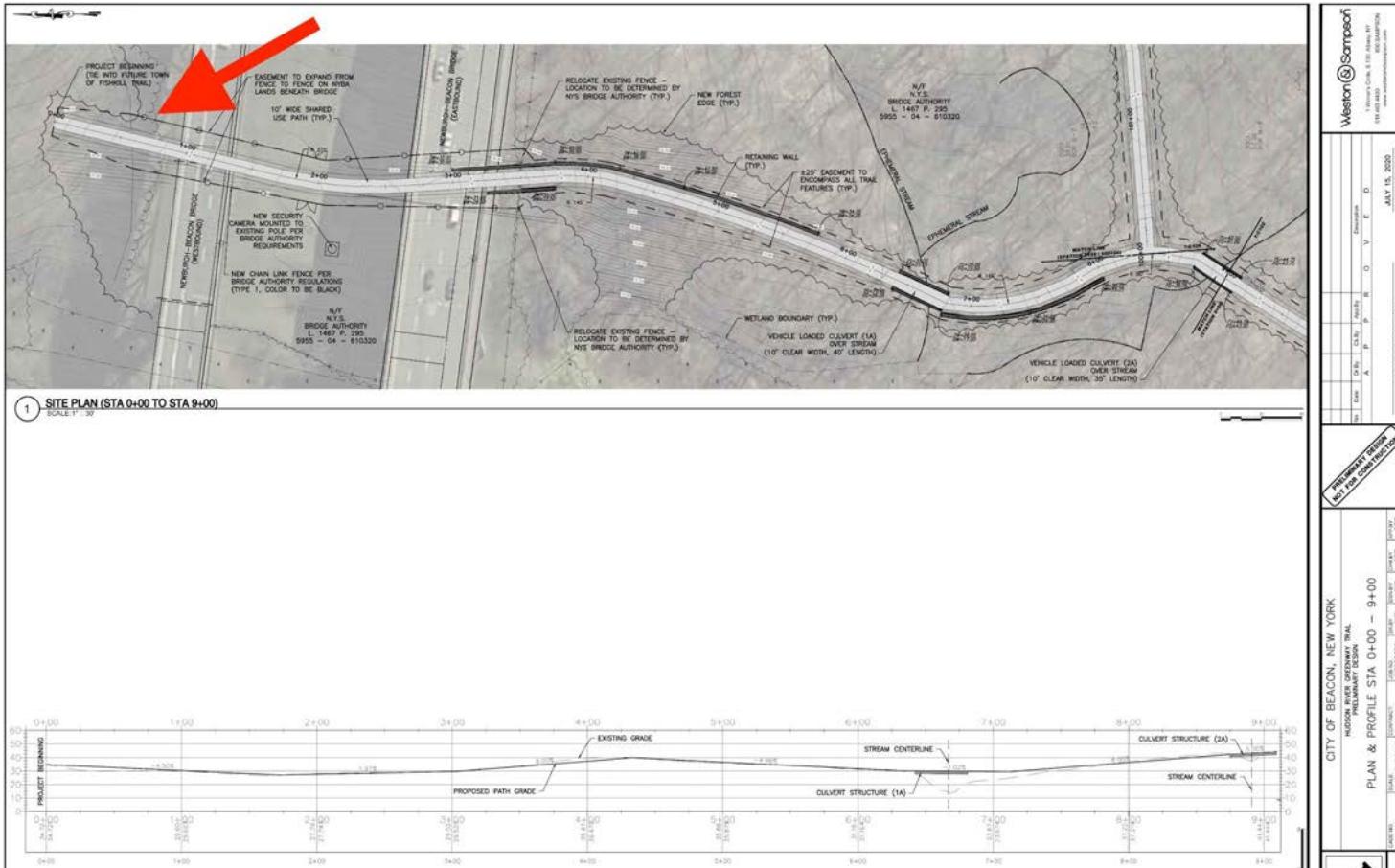


1 SITE PLAN (STA 105+00 TO STA 112+00)
SHEET 1 OF

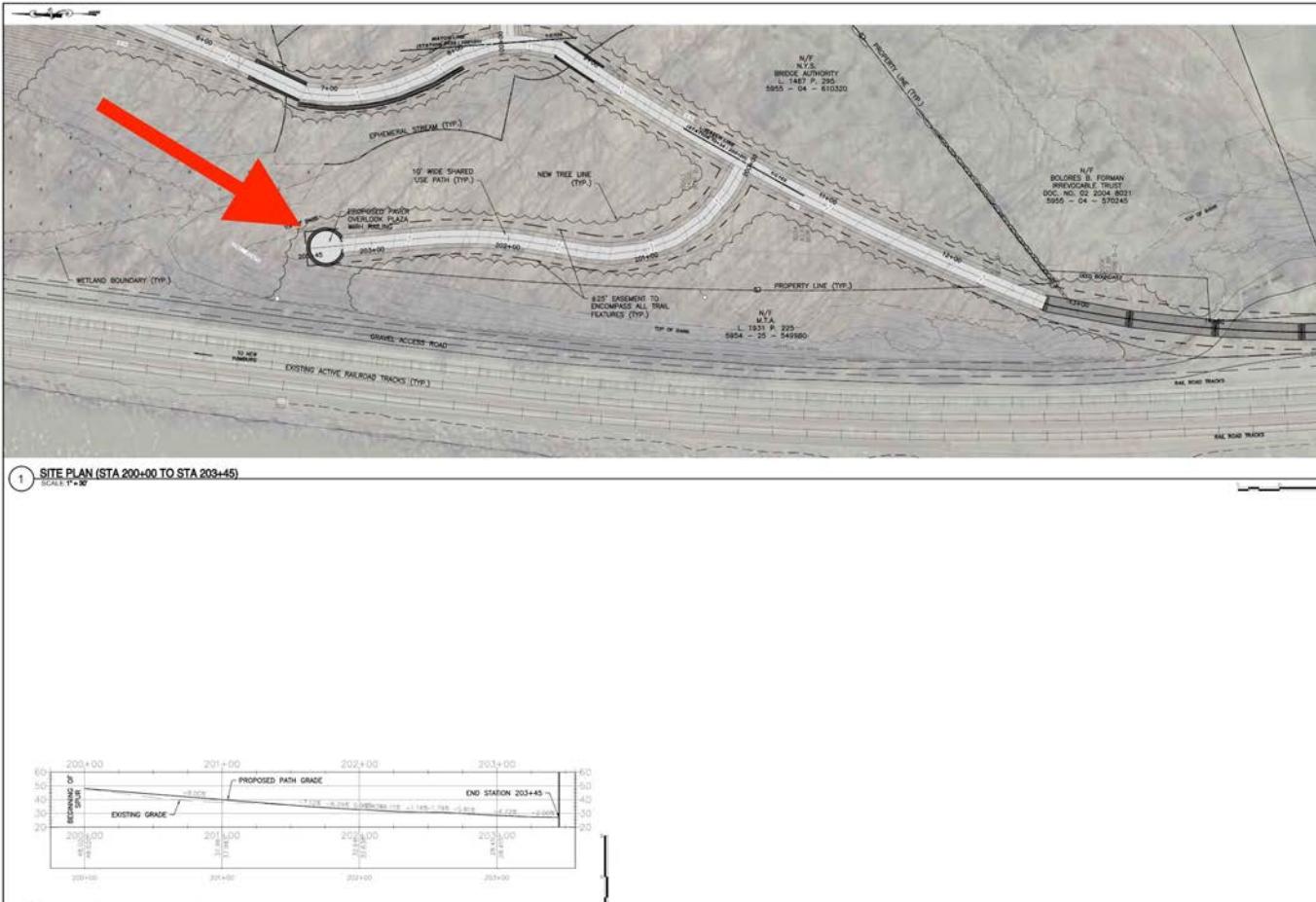


switchbacks and retaining walls required to navigate the drop in topography between the bridge, and the bluff just above the rail line.

Weston @ Sampson		1 Winton Circle, Rte 10, Suite 100, New York, NY 10503-3840 609-426-5400 weston@sampson.com	
		MAILING ADDRESS	TELEPHONE NUMBER
		DATE ISSUED: MAY 15, 2000	
		SHEET NUMBER: 1 OF 1	
		DRAWING NUMBER: 105	
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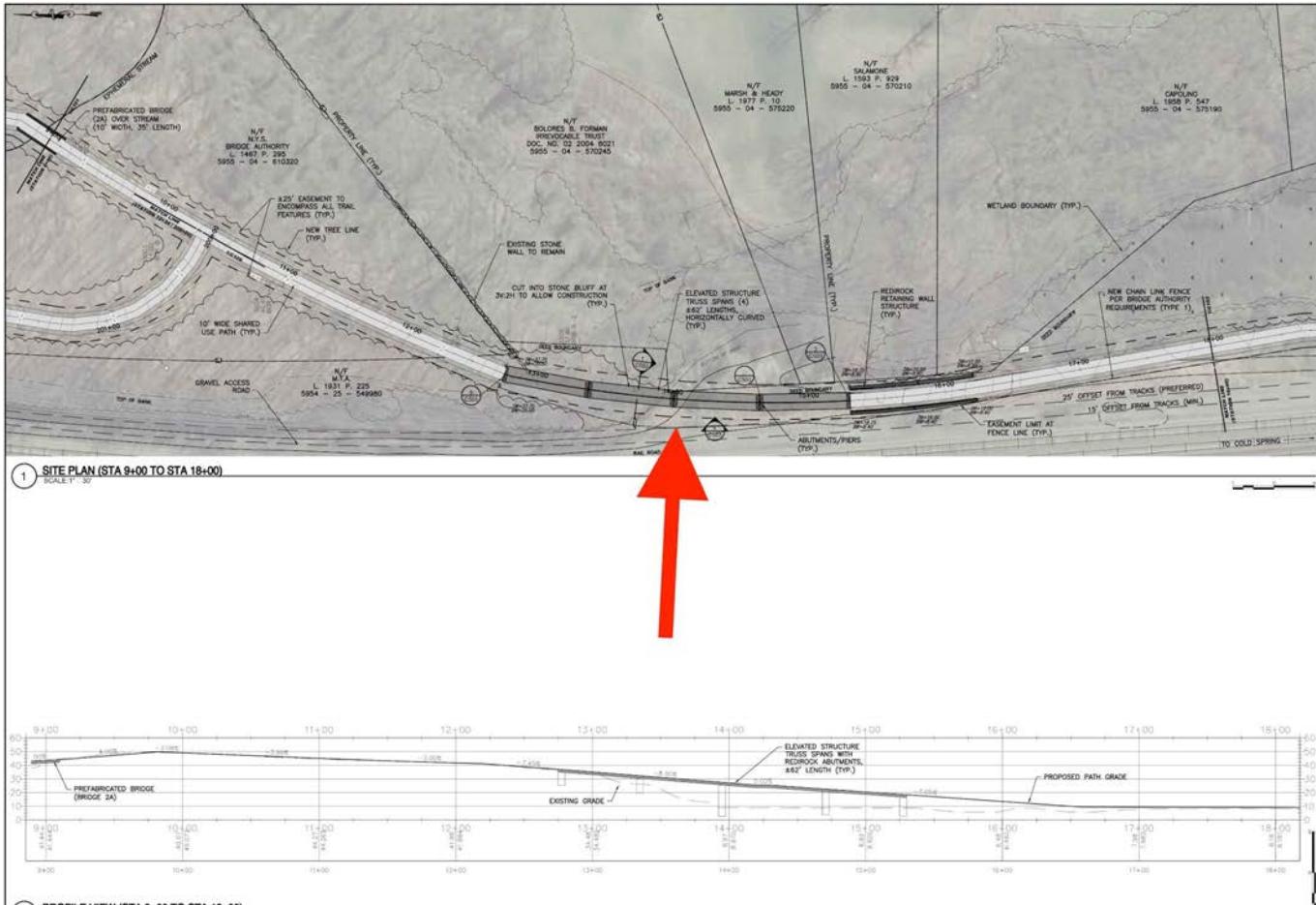


a future connection to residential communities in the town of Fishkill, on the north side of the I-84 bridge. Permissions, cameras, and security fencing are required by the bridge authority, and are outlined in detail in the report.

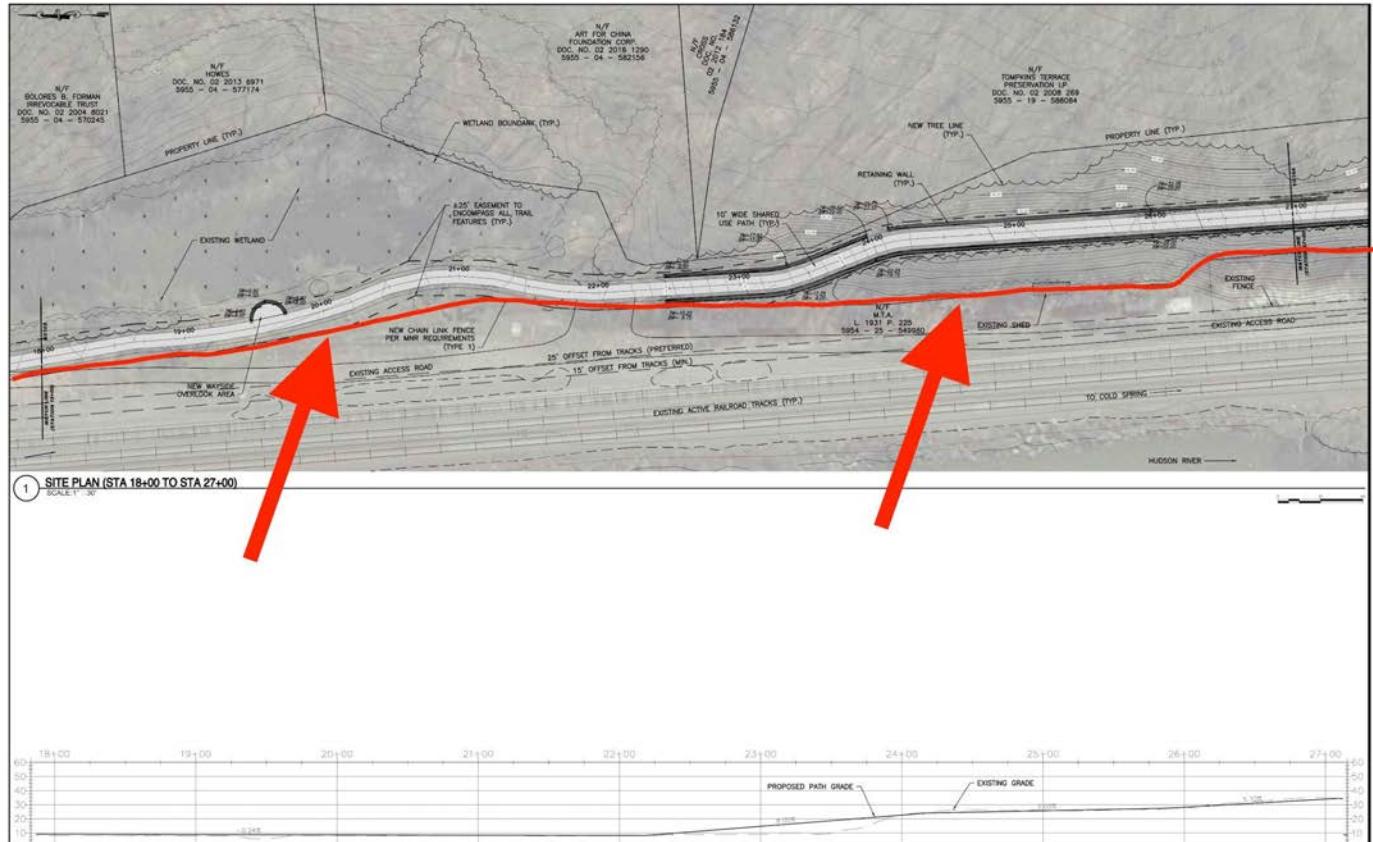


a viewing plaza at the bluff will provide a unique view of the Hudson, bracketed by the dramatic bridge structure above.

CITY OF BEACON, NEW YORK	
NATIONAL RAILROAD OFF DRAKE TRAIL	
PLAN & PROFILE STA 200+00 - 203+45	
Scale (in.)	Bar Scale
1/4" = 30'	1/4" = 30'
Drawing No. 109	
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an elevated portion of the trail which navigates the rapid change in topography between the bluff, and the MTA rail line.



fencing locations and specifications as required by the MTA to keep trail users safe from metro north train service.

The design report and plans describe the proposed trail in a way that makes the project real. It analyzes the site, describes the challenges, and proposes solutions to these challenges. It provides enough information to generate a preliminary budget, included in the report.



The estimate of costs comes in at just over \$5M, with additional fees required for final construction documents necessary to make the project shovel-ready. When we presented the design report to the city council in December of 2020, we proposed a phased approach to the implementation of the trail. In fact, the design report included language regarding a phased approach. to quote: "As a first phase, it would be beneficial to establish an informal soft surface trail alignment, set-up access agreements/easements with property owners, and therefore enable access for interested trail users."

At the time of the presentation to the city council, we hoped that a preliminary phase could begin immediately, even as grant funds are sought for final construction documents.



An initial phase would focus on the portion of the trail between the pedestrian path at the bridge, and the viewing plaza at the bluff above the rail line. This would leave the portion of the trail along the rail line inaccessible and off limits for the time being. This initial phase would include securing trail easements from property owners, which in this case is a single entity, the Bridge Authority. easements are the critical element of this approach, as it secures the legal access for the public to walk on, and eventually across, private property. With easements in place, an informal trail could be constructed by volunteers or by other low cost methods. thereby quickly opening up this area for passive use recreation. In addition to the recreational benefits, bringing in users to the area would create awareness and support for the trail as a whole, further strengthening any future funding efforts.

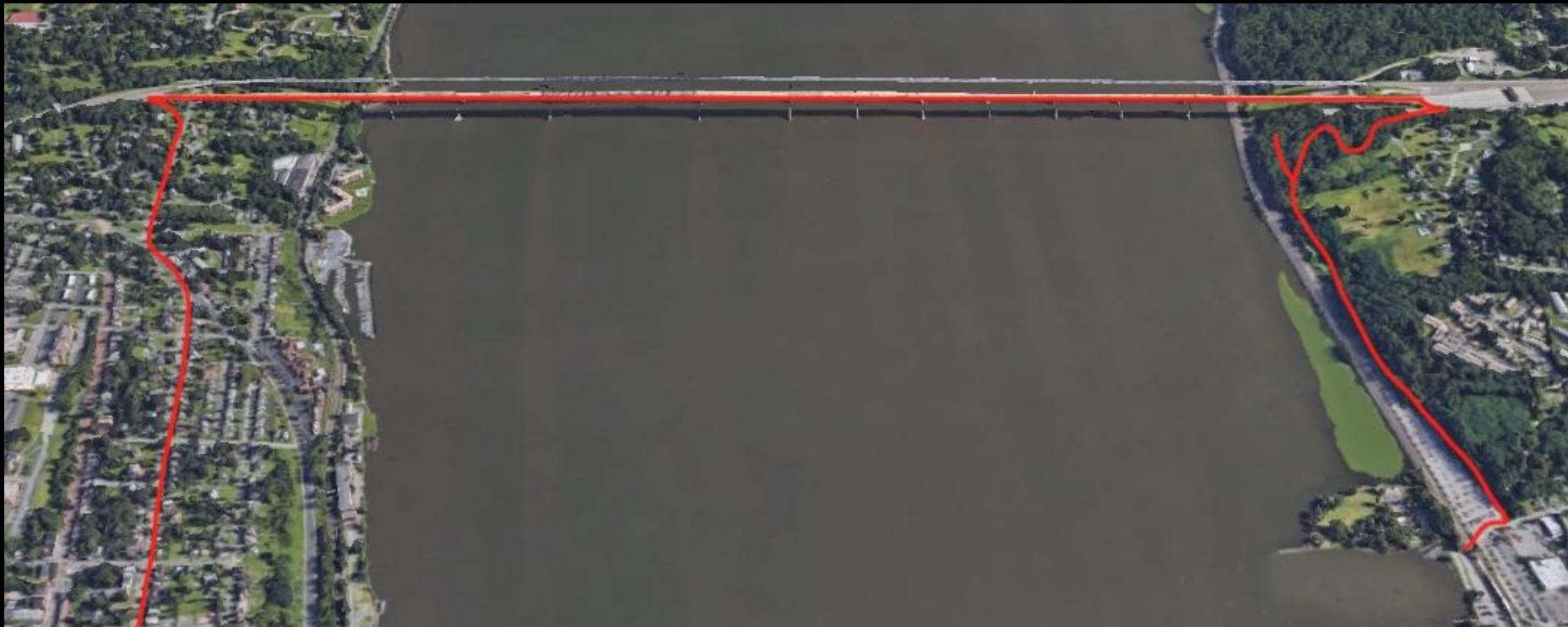


Strategically and Tactically, this approach emerges from our experiences with the Beacon Greenway. We recognize the importance of good overall planning, and have sought out help through grant-funded consultants when such planning was beyond the capabilities of our Committee. Proactive conceptual planning and pushing for easement access emerges from our desire to secure public access to the natural landscape and their adjacent greenway and trail networks. The committee has achieved a lot for the city's trail network by taking the long view, and we realize that these networks often require patience. The strategy of phased realization of trail access that I have outlined today, is a way to expedite the implementation process for the Beacon Hudson River Trail as well as the Beacon Greenway.



However, Although I am personally still committed to an approach that secures access for the public quickly, I wonder if such an approach is an example of not thinking big enough, not thinking ambitiously enough, and perhaps allowing priorities based on experiential considerations to limit possibilities for achieving something much bigger.

Last April, I was contacted by a group from Newburgh, led by Naomi Hersson-Ringskog, promoting bicycle use and amenities. They accurately saw the potential of the Beacon Hudson River Trail as an important link for citizens of Newburgh and surrounding areas to the MTA Beacon station, and proposed applying for a Mid-Hudson TMA grant to realize these goals. The funds sought through the grant would easily get us through to shovel ready design documents and closer to our goal of realization for the Beacon Hudson River Trail.



Focusing on the transportation opportunities transformed my thinking about the Beacon Hudson River Trail. Interestingly, this evolution may have hinged on the question of the trail surface. Our work with the Beacon Greenway has promoted stone dust for surfaces throughout, since it is a far more pleasant surface to walk on. However, asphalt in this case would provide maintenance benefits, and a smoother more reliable surface that might tip the balance from bike recreation, to bike transit. Even though the connection to the MTA station was always key to this trail, our predisposition to favor the stone dust was an indication of a bias in favor of recreation over transit. Our consultant had noted the transportation-related funding benefits of using asphalt. We pushed back on that approach at the time, but I think it is important to question that position now, if it comes at the expense of a vital connection for bicycles to the train station, or getting the trail built with DOT funds quickly.



I also think that we need to evaluate the purpose of the Beacon Hudson River Trail relative to its role in mitigating climate heating. As I'm sure this group is very well aware, improvements to cycling and walking infrastructure makes these transit options viable options for more people. This in turn pays very real dividends in reducing vehicle miles traveled, which of course delivers climate heating mitigation rewards. We should be aware of and seek out opportunities that support these efforts, and not overlook them for the sake of favoring recreation over transit. The selection of the surface for the Beacon Hudson River Trail may act as a case in point: stone dust is preferred, yet the choice of asphalt, given its possible benefits for use and maintenance, would mean an increase in non-vehicular traffic to and from the MTA Beacon station. The good news is that even on asphalt, this trail will be quite lovely, and provides access to a unique landscape.



Emphasizing the transit-oriented nature of the Beacon Hudson River Trail also becomes an opportunity to educate others, many in decision-making positions, to change their view of the purpose of a trail connection like the Beacon Hudson River Trail, and to give it the priority it deserves. In good weather, I ride across the bridge between Beacon and Newburgh daily on my way to work. It is a beautiful ride, but although I enjoy every bit of it, I don't see it as recreation, I see it as transit. This is a good opportunity to point out the critically valuable piece of infrastructure that the bridge authority provides and maintains by way of the bike and pedestrian pathway portion of the Newburgh Beacon Bridge. It already connects two cities with non-vehicular transit options. We owe the New York State Bridge Authority a debt of gratitude for this critical link. And here again, there is no sacrifice in recreational benefits. In addition to the vital link the bridge offers to bike and pedestrian commuters, this pathway gets heavy use from cycling enthusiasts who use it to access great riding terrain on both sides of the Hudson River.



A direct link to the train station would be a game changer, leveraging an existing critically vital and heavily used pathway to give residents of Beacon, Newburgh and Fishkill a non-vehicular option that links mass transit and neighboring communities that is both safe and scenic. And let's not forget the aforementioned Fjord Trail and future Beacon to Hopewell Junction rail trail. Both of these link to the Metro North Train Station, which would mean a direct link to the Beacon Hudson River Trail, which in turn creates connections to Cold Spring, Hopewell Junction and of course the empire trail. When I consider the trail initiatives that we are actively pursuing in and around Beacon, indeed, when I consider the Fjord trail itself. I have to acknowledge the emphasis on recreation, and how there seems to be a dividing line between recreational use and transit use. Not only do I think that it is necessary to question where this line falls, but I think it's past time for these projects to be seen as the vital infrastructure that they are. Yes, we've achieved a lot with activism, with grant funding and fund-raising, but we also need to raise awareness of what these projects do for the greater good, and insist on the public funding and public support that they deserve.

Thank you. I look forward to questions.