

DCR Hammond Pond Parkway Project
Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation

RE: Joint Newton advocacy group comments on proposed Hammond Pond Parkway improvements
February 17, 2021

Dear DCR Hammond Pond Parkway Team,

We are writing to you as a united group of advisory, advocacy, and friends organizations (the Newton Transportation Advisory Group, the Newton Conservators, Friends of Webster Woods, Green Newton, the Newton Safe Routes to School Task Force, and Bike Newton) to voice our strong support for the DCR proposal to improve Hammond Pond Parkway. The proposed plan will greatly enhance the safety of this parkway for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers.

At the same time, the proposed improvements will increase access to the adjacent open spaces including the Webster Conservation Area and the Hammond Pond Reservation. We believe that DCR's proposed plans will transform Hammond Pond Parkway from the four laned highway that it is now into a more attractive roadway, a multi-use path, and a destination open space in its own right. This opportunity to depave a significant amount of sensitive parkland and redesign it in a more environmentally responsible way is one we cannot and should not miss.

We suggest that DCR include the following changes and additions to the plan to make the Hammond Pond Parkway project even better.

Pedestrian Improvements

1. Narrow and square up the driveway entrances to The Shops at Chestnut Hill and the Boston College property driveway. As presented, those are long exposed crossings for pedestrians and cyclists who are at risk of being struck by a turning vehicle.
2. Add pedestrian access in the form of a permeable path along the east side of Hammond Pond Parkway for the full length of the project. This facility will provide much needed connectivity between the trails on the east side, reduce erosion from informal paths, and serve as an alternate route for pedestrians who wish to avoid sharing the multi-use path with cyclists.
3. Add a second parking area between the MBTA tracks and Beacon St. This lot would provide access to the proposed new entrance to the former Deer Park on the east side and to the portions of Webster Conservation Area north of the MBTA tracks on the west side. This parking area would increase accessibility and safety for park goers with mobility limitations who have no other parking options near this site.

4. Add a second crosswalk in the area north of the MBTA tracks to connect our proposed northern parking area with the path and trails on either side of the parkway.
5. Add pedestrian-activated pedestrian warning signs such as Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacons (RRFBs) to both the DCR-proposed crosswalk and the newly proposed northern crosswalk to increase visibility of pedestrians. With a speed limit of 30 mph, expected heavy traffic volumes at certain times of day, and intermittently heavy pedestrian use by visitors and families unfamiliar with the site, active warning of pedestrians in the crosswalk is critical.
6. Add two pedestrian crossings of Hammond Pond Parkway at the existing traffic light at The Shops at Chestnut Hill to provide access to our proposed walking path on the east side of the Parkway from the DCR-owned mall parking lot and The Towers residential community.
7. Provide a pleasant park experience for the multi-use path with a berm sufficiently wide to sustain mature trees and plantings. Provide benches, pull-off areas, and other amenities.

Biking Improvements

8. In anticipation of future plans by the City of Newton, provide fully protected raised bicycle lanes throughout the project limits along both sides of Beacon Street to accommodate this heavily used cycling route.
9. Separate the left turn bicyclist movement from Beacon St. westbound to Hammond Pond Parkway southbound from the Beacon St. westbound through movement. Left turners should not block or conflict with through riders.
10. Consider the location and use of lighting that can illuminate the path for safe travel during the evening winter bicycling commute.
11. To accommodate vehicular bicyclists and group bicycle rides while reducing conflict between pedestrians and fast bicyclists, increase on-street shoulder width to 4.5 feet and reduce travel lane width to 10.5 feet. Strava data shows this is a popular route for cycling athletes and commuters traveling around 20mph, who typically avoid shared use bike paths for safety reasons.
12. Move drainage grates out of the shoulder where possible to increase the effective shoulder width for on-street bicyclists.
13. Add more bike racks at trailheads. This both encourages arrival by bike and reminds cyclists that bikes are not allowed on the trails.
14. When designing parking areas, prioritize safety for all road users, including parkway drivers, users of the parking lot, and on-street cyclists.

15. Add an additional pedestrian crossing of Beacon Street from just east of Hobart Rd. to the island on the south side. This crossing can proceed without conflict on an existing planned signal phase.
16. Accommodate bicycle access to and from the north via Hobart Road. Hobart Rd. is the shortest north-south connection between Beacon St. and Commonwealth Ave. A potential future northbound contraflow bicycle lane on Hobart would connect Hammond Pond Parkway to the Commonwealth Avenue carriageway and points north.

Wayfinding Improvements

17. Provide unified and comprehensive wayfinding for all DCR and City of Newton parks, trails, open space, and associated parking facilities along the Hammond Pond Parkway corridor.
18. In particular, DCR owns the northernmost parking lot used by the Shops at Chestnut Hill and DCR has the permanent right to allow visitors to Hammond Pond Reservation to park on this lot. To expand public use of this parking area, we propose the following:
 - a. Add signs reading “Webster Woods and Hammond Pond Reservation Parking” to each side of the existing signpost at The Shops at Chestnut Hill traffic light on the Parkway.
 - b. Add a similar sign at the edge of the mall parking lot nearest the trailhead that leads into the reservation.
19. Similar treatment is needed for the eastern side:
 - a. Add signs reading “Webster Woods and Hammond Pond Reservation Parking” to existing signposts at the Parkway entrance to The Street.
 - b. Add a similar sign at the entrance to the small parking lot next to Hammond Pond that leads to the trailhead kiosk.

DCR-owned land at the Shops at Chestnut Hill

21. A comprehensive plan is required to organize motor vehicle traffic and improve the safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, residents, and park visitors within the DCR-controlled land inside the Shops at Chestnut Hill site.
 - a. Bicycle and pedestrian access to and from the Shops, The Towers, the Webster Woods trailhead, and the signal-controlled crossing of Route 9 that connects to Wegman’s Plaza.
 - b. Safe parking and connections to the same facilities by park visitors traveling by car and parking on the site.
 - c. Visitor and residential access to and from the multi-use path.

22. Facilities on this site could include designated bicycle lanes, narrowed travel lanes, designated or segregated parking for the multi-use path and Webster Woods, improved sidewalks, and site wayfinding.

23. Any such improvements should be made in consultation with the City of Newton and the residents of the Towers.

Thank you for your efforts to improve Hammond Pond Parkway. We look forward to supporting the ongoing public process.

Sincerely,

Michael Halle, Chair, Transportation Advisory Group, for its Citizen Members
Jenn Martin, Chair, Newton Safe Routes to School Task Force, for its Citizen Members
Ed Olhava, President, Bike Newton
Rory J. Altman, Co-Chair, Friends of Webster Woods
Marcia Cooper, President, Green Newton
Ted Kuklinski, President, Newton Conservators