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Reinventing Hammond Pond Parkway

The reconfiguration of Hammond Pond Parkway between Beacon Street and Route 9 is now closer to becoming reality having recently been approved by The City of Newton Conservation Commission. The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) owns the parkway, and therefore is responsible for the design, permitting, and construction of the project.

Turning the Parkway into a Destination

Few pedestrians and bicyclists currently use the parkway because it is unfriendly, uninviting, and somewhat dangerous with no space designated for pedestrians or bikers and two narrow lanes of automobile traffic in each direction. Pedestrians trying to cross Hammond Pond Parkway face a daunting task crossing 4 lanes of traffic moving fast, particularly during peak traffic hours. In contrast, the woods on either side of the roadway are quite popular with walkers and joggers from all parts of the city and beyond. The trails provide inviting



PHOTO: RICHARD PRIMACK

Hammond Pond Parkway looking north toward Beacon Street.



PHOTO: RICHARD PRIMACK

Pull-off areas used by visitors to explore the adjacent woods.

spaces to enjoy nature and exercise away from vehicular traffic. A goal of this redesign is to welcome pedestrian and bike traffic to the parkway and integrate it more with the adjoining public open spaces as the parkway becomes safer and more inviting.

Peter Reed of Build, Support, and Protect Group (BSC) Group asked attendees at a public meeting in January 2021 to “imagine what this [will] be. We [will] turn this into a destination.” DCR’s Dan Driscoll said that it’s their aim to create a “family friendly facility” that is also environmentally sensitive.

The Project

This roughly one-mile stretch of road will become significantly more environmentally and pedestrian / biker friendly as the roadway is reduced from four lanes to two and a shared use 12-foot-wide pedestrian / bike pathway is added to the west side (closer to Newton

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Center) of the new roadway layout. The eastern side of the road will have a four-foot-wide gravel walkway adjacent to it. The pathway will also be separated from the roadway with a planting area that acts as a visual screen to soften the impact of the adjacent road as well as a safety buffer between the bikers and pedestrians and the cars on the road. More importantly though, this buffer acts as a drainage retention area for runoff from the pathway, infiltrating rainwater back into the ground and recharging the aquifer below.



Elevation of proposed redesign looking north.

The parkway will remain open during the two years it is expected to take to build the new design. Construction is expected to begin in late 2023.

Project Details



Hammond Pond Parkway looking south from Beacon Street.

The cost of the project was estimated at \$6.5 million at the beginning of this year and is included in DCR’s five-year budget plan. The current plan is a culmination of initial design by DCR, which is responsible for the parkway, and the BSC Group, a private design firm. In addition, public input was incorporated through a public meeting on

January 21, 2021, as well as multiple opportunities for online public comment and input from Mayor Fuller and the Newton City Council. This is the first significant change in Hammond Pond Parkway since it was initially constructed in 1934.



Crosswalks that will become more pedestrian friendly at the Beacon Street Intersection.

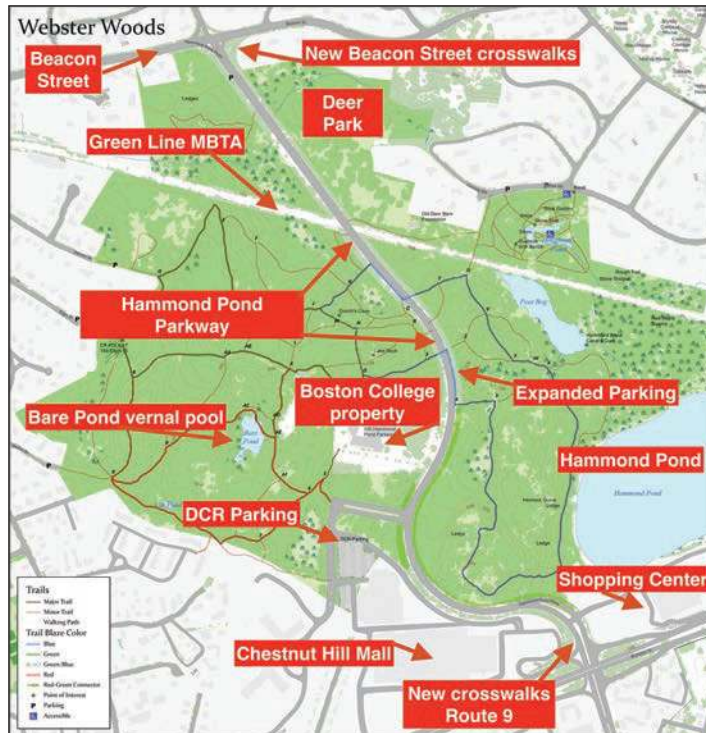
Crosswalks

The renovation requires a major re-design of the Beacon Street intersection where crosswalks will be revamped for increased safety, but little would change at the Route 9 intersection. Three new crosswalks will also be installed: one at the parking lot entrance to The Street mall just before the parkway intersection with Route 9; another will be at the entrance road to the Chestnut Hill Mall, and a third will be near the Boston College property. Four crosswalks versus the one currently in place at Beacon Street will greatly increase the ease and safety of crossing to/from Webster and Hammond Woods as well as giving easier bike and pedestrian commuter access to the two malls.

Parking

For safety reasons, parking along the roadway will no longer be allowed except in one designated area diagonally across from the former temple (now BC property). Lack of a clear line of site is a primary concern, as most of the roadway does not have a long enough distance for neither drivers to be able to see cars pulling off the side of the road, nor are those pulling out from a parked position able to see oncoming cars with enough time to avoid accidents. As more bikers, joggers, and walkers are attracted to the area with the redesign, everyone’s safety becomes even more of a concern. To ensure that people do not park along the side of the road, granite curbing will be installed for the entire length of the renovated area.

Parking on the east side of the parkway opposite the Boston College property will be expanded and improved. In addition, DCR plans to use its parking lot adjacent to the Chestnut Hill Mall. This parking lot is located along the mall and Chestnut Hill Tower access road and includes the first group of spaces on the left as one drives in from the parkway. The lot looks like it is part of the Chestnut Hill Mall, but it is actually owned by DCR. (Currently, there is a clothing donation box on two of the DCR spaces.)



The Environment

DCR filed a Notice of Intent (NOI) with the Newton Conservation Commission (Newton Con Comm) in order to ensure that their design complied with the state Wetland Protection Act (WPA). The Newton Con Comm worked closely with DCR and their consultants as the commission reviewed the plans and modifications made at three separate hearings over the course of two months. The resulting design is significantly more environmentally friendly than the current layout. Not only is there substantially less asphalt, but also the drainage has been designed with deep sumps and subsurface chambers to catch road salts, other solids, and oils so they will no longer flow directly into the adjacent streams or nearby wetlands as they currently do. Oils and salt from roads are known to harm water quality. Existing drainage today is directed to the side of the road or directly into adjacent streams without any pretreatment.

In addition to pretreating the drainage at all locations along the new road before it is released along the side of the road,



the rate of flow of drainage water was reduced with bigger stone areas at headwalls of drain lines, thereby increasing water absorption and slowing the flow of the drain water so it does not scour the soil creating ravines with soil runoff that otherwise would have entered nearby Hammond Brook. Drainage structures were also relocated to preserve more trees in the conservation areas next to the road and path.

The new 15-foot-wide planted strip between the pathway and the road will capture stormwater runoff from the pathway, trap nutrients and sediment, and allow rainwater to infiltrate into the ground and recharge the aquifer below. The planting plan for the new vegetated strip between the roadway and the shared-use path was optimized for native habitat, stormwater treatment, and public safety. While the pathway will be lit, the fixtures will point downward and will focus the light on the pathway, keeping light in the areas where needed for safety and minimizing spill over into adjacent wetlands, vernal pool and habitat. As part of construction, DCR will also remove invasive plants around the new drainage they build, particularly around wetland buffers and drainage near Hammond Brook.

This roadway redesign is a great example of making our public spaces safer and more inviting, while at the same time making them more environmentally friendly. As City of Newton Chief Environmental Planner, Jennifer Steel said, “It was wonderful to work closely with DCR on this project, which will encourage people to engage in alternative transit, provide greatly expanded safe access to the City’s Webster Conservation Area/Webster Woods and DCR’s Hammond Pond Reservation for healthy outdoor recreation, and enhance water quality and wildlife habitat. This project truly is a win-win-win.” ♦

— Daniel Green, *Newton Conservators’ Board Member and Newton Conservation Commission Chair*