

# NORTH ADAMS ASHUWILTICOOK TRAIL EXTENSION OPEN HOUSE

*October 29, 2014*

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

The goal of the Ashuwillticook Bike and Pedestrian Trail Extension Planning Project is to connect the downtown areas of North Adams and Williamstown via a bicycle/pedestrian path. Ultimately, the path would connect with the Ashuwillticook Trail in Adams. The project is a joint effort between the City of North Adams, the Town of Williamstown, and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation. The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) is working with the City of North Adams to finalize the route from the Williamstown border to the city center. The Northern Berkshire Community Coalition is providing assistance through its Mass In Motion program.

In previous community and multi-use path planning efforts, residents spoke clearly that they prefer a dedicated, off-road path rather than on-road bike lanes. The most important criteria for them are safety, universal access and scenery. Residents largely view a bike/ped path that will be used primarily for outdoor recreation, and that would create new links to nature, connect people to destinations, and act as a driver for future economic development. The existing Ashuwillticook Rail Trail was seen as the model for a future path to connect downtown Williamstown and North Adams.

On October 28, 2014 the preliminary bike/ped route was presented to the North Adams City Council. Lauren Gaherty of BRPC provided a background and summary of the overall project and Mackenzie Greer, North Adams City Planner, walked the Councilors through the route.

## OPEN HOUSE OVERVIEW

On October 29, 2014 project partners held an Open House gathering at the Greylock School on Phelps Avenue to unveil the preliminary, proposed bike path route to area residents. Local residents were informed about this opportunity to review and comment on the preliminary route through articles published in local media and from the previous night's presentation to the North Adams City Council, which is televised live on community cable. Although all local residents interested in the design and construction of a bike/ped path were invited to attend, residents of North Adams were the main target audience for the Open House, as finalizing the route through the difficult terrain of the city are a particular focus of current planning efforts.

Approximately 69 area residents attended the Open House. While the majority of attendees were from North Adams, many Williamstown also attended, along with others from Adams, Pittsfield and other Berkshire County communities. Staff from North Adams, Williamstown, MassDOT, BRPC and the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition attended, including from North Adams Mayor Alcombright, Director of Community Development Mike Nuvalle, and City Planner Mackenzie Greer; from Williamstown Planner Andrew Groff; and from BRPC Senior Planner Lauren Gaherty and Planner Gwen Miller. Massachusetts State Representative Gailanne Cariddi was also in attendance.

## **Our Design Criteria**

### **Resident Desires for a Bike/Ped Trail:**

- ◆ **Dedicated, off-road trail is preferred 3:1 over on-road**
- ◆ **Most important criteria: Safety, Universal Access and Scenery**
- ◆ **Serve primarily for outdoor recreation**
- ◆ **Create new links to nature**
- ◆ **Connect people to destinations**
- ◆ **Act as a driver for future economic development**



### **Design Criteria:**

- ◆ **Stay off-road as much as possible**
- ◆ **Relatively level terrain — less than 5% slope whenever possible**
- ◆ **Increase access to the Hoosic River and scenic views**
- ◆ **Maximize use of and links to public properties**
- ◆ **Minimize crossings of Route 2, railroad, rivers and wetlands**
- ◆ **Link southward to the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail**
- ◆ **Serve as an alternate transportation route**
- ◆ **Cost of engineering, construction and maintenance**



Residents were invited to informally view posters describing the project and maps displaying the proposed bike/ped route. The entire length of the proposed North Adams route, from the Williamstown border to the city center, was displayed on a series of large aerial photographic maps, allowing residents to see a bird's eye view of the route and neighborhoods of particular interest. Residents were asked to point out challenges or opportunities related to the route and its environment with sticky notes or markers. Two additional posters depicted the Barbour Street design options for residents to review.

After 45 minutes of informal review and comment, attendees were given a presentation about the overall project, which included the design of the route through both Williamstown and North Adams. This presentation provided background on the project, design criteria used in evaluating potential routes, and highlighted existing opportunities and challenges. The presentation is attached to this summary. Prior to the presentation Mayor Alcombright provided an introduction to welcome attendees to the workshop and to talk about the significance of the bike path in terms of economic development, public health and outdoor recreation, and also the history of the project. He reassured attendees that the routes were still under development and no route was cast in stone.

After the presentation, residents were encouraged to ask staff questions, and to mark up the maps and posters. Staff were available to receive resident input at the maps and Barbour Street options posters. Comments were written directly on the maps and posters, or attached on post-it notes. These comments have been transferred to the maps and posters shown on pages 4-10.

## PROPOSED ROUTE AND FINDINGS

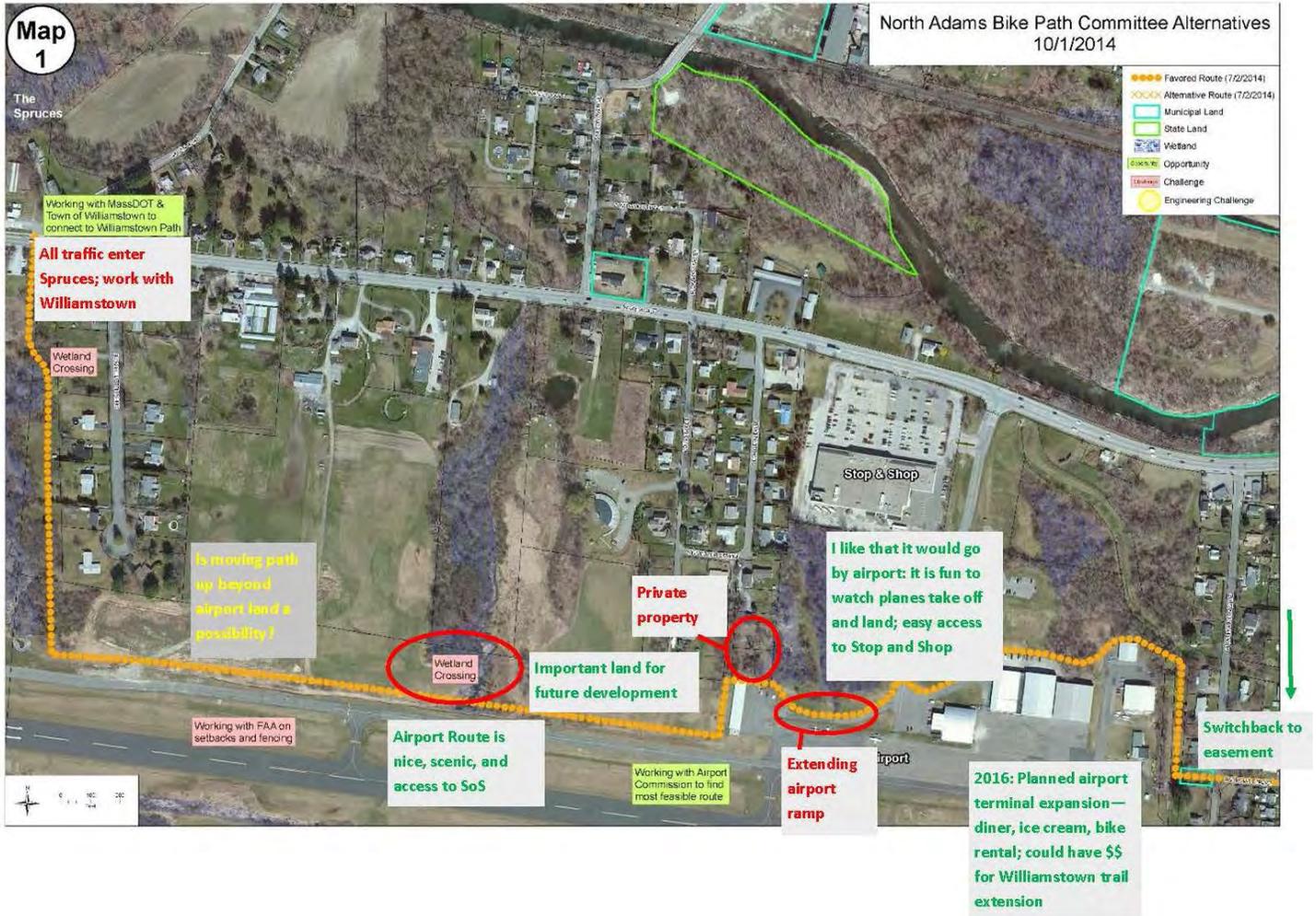
The maps are displayed below with annotations depicting what residents said about the route components.

Participants were also able to make comments on a proposed design for the bike path along Barbour Street. They were provided with two scenarios. The first scenario depicted Barbour Street as a one-way street with a two-way bike path on one side, while the second scenario depicted Barbour Street as a one-way street with one-way bike paths on each side of the road.

Opportunities identified and posted by residents on maps and posters are indicated in green, challenges are in red and questions are in yellow.

# MAP 1

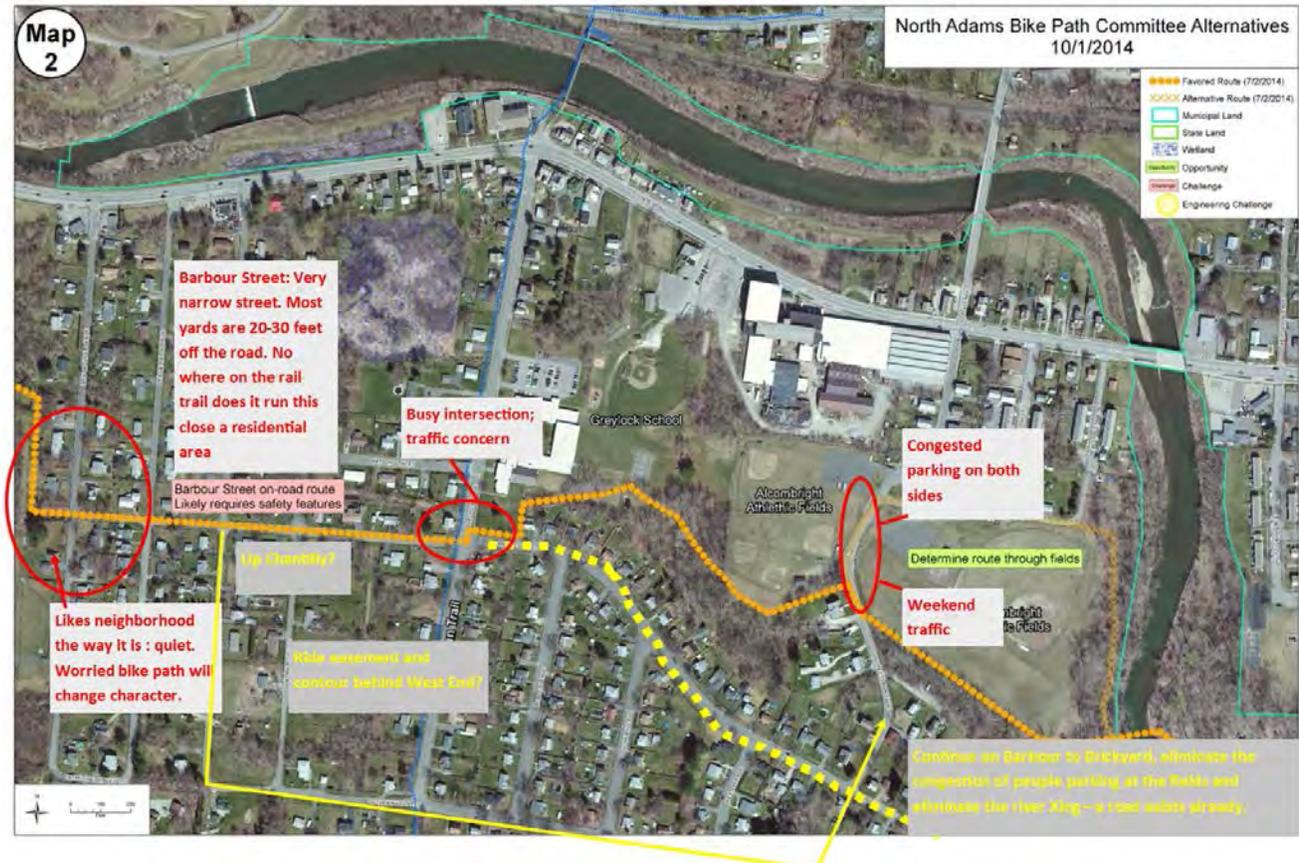
*This first map depicts the proposed route as it travels east from the Williamstown border.*



In this segment residents felt that the Harriman West airport offers both opportunity and challenges. Participants noted the airport's scenic qualities, the enjoyment of watching planes take off and land, and the route's easy access to the Stop & Shop supermarket. Airport terminal expansion planned for 2016 could offer opportunity to offer bicycle facilities such as bike racks or bike rentals, as well as dining options such as a small café or ice cream stand. The land to the west of the airport, immediately to the north of the proposed route, was noted to be very important to the airport's future development. Wetland impacts were highlighted and one person asked if it would be possible to move the bike path north of the proposed route and beyond the airport.

## MAP 2

*This second map of the proposed route depicts the route traveling along Barbour Street, past the Greylock School and Alcombright Athletic Fields toward and across the river.*

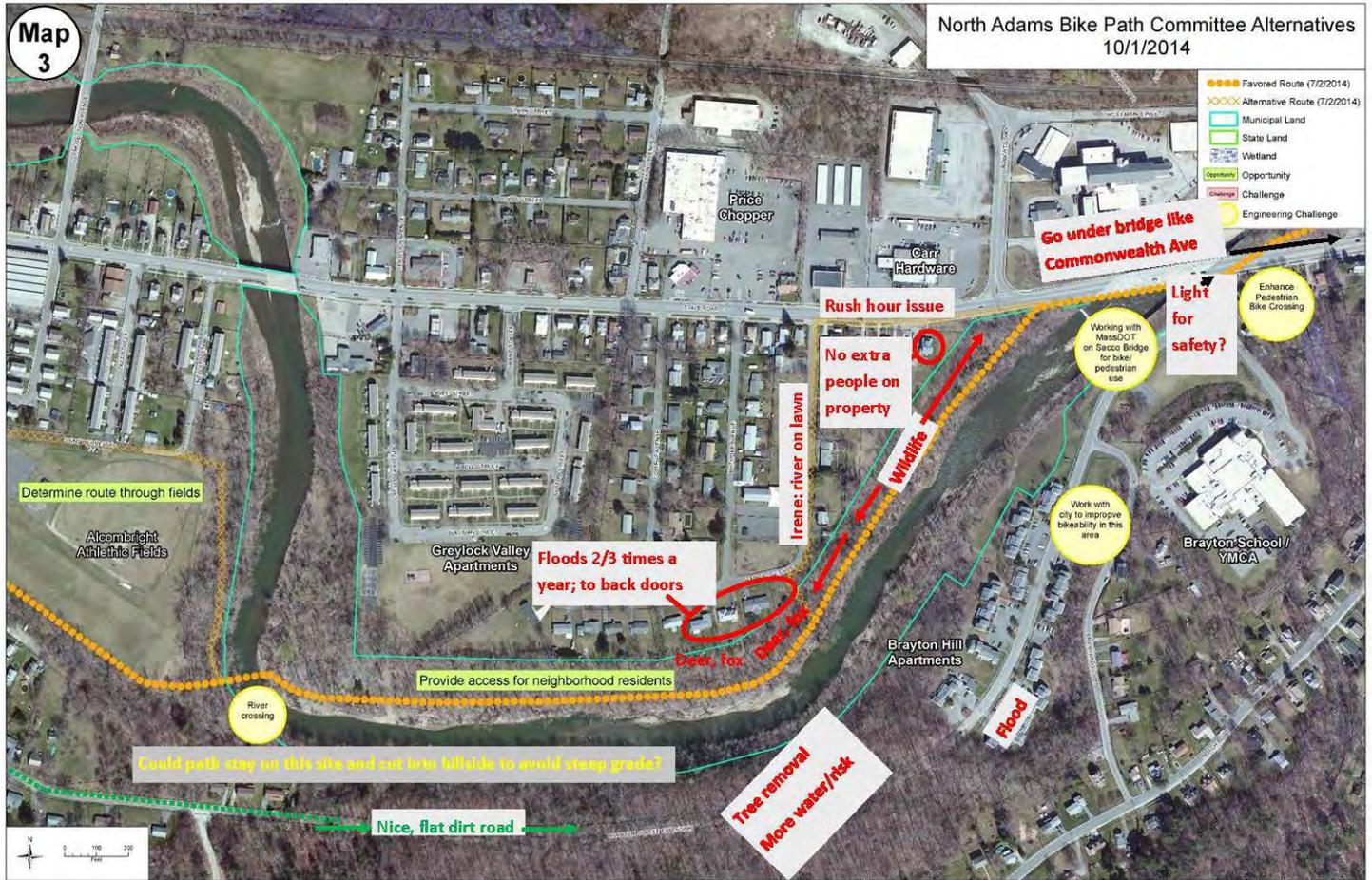


This segment proposes to modify Barbour Street between

In terms of challenges, residents noted traffic concerns in this segment. A busy Intersection was noted at Phelps and Barbour. Weekend traffic and congested parking on both sides of the road were noted on Protection Avenue between both Alcombright Athletic fields. It was noted that Barbour Street is the only neighborhood in which the proposed bike path goes as close as within 20-30 feet of residences. A resident also noted concern that the path will bring more people into his very quiet neighborhood. Somebody asked if the route could go up Chantilly Avenue and then ride an easement and contour behind the West End neighborhood. Another alternate route was suggested, and is highlighted in blue on Map 2. It would continue on Barbour to Brickyard, eliminating the congestion of people parking at the fields and eliminating the river crossing.

### MAP 3

The third map of the proposed route depicts the path after it has crossed the Hoosic River and passes the Greylock Valley Apartments toward Sacco Bridge.



In this segment, a nice, flat dirt road was described across the river. A participant asked if the path could stay on the south side of the river by cutting into the hill to avoid the steep grade. In terms of issues, residents describe seasonal flooding, and much wildlife presence, including deer and fox. It was also noted that many trees would require removal. Flooding was also mentioned at the Brayton Hill apartments. One resident noted that they would not like to have extra people on their property. A rush hour issue was noted on State Road. One person suggested going under the bridge as was done along Commonwealth Avenue, and lighting was suggested to improve safety.

# MAP 4

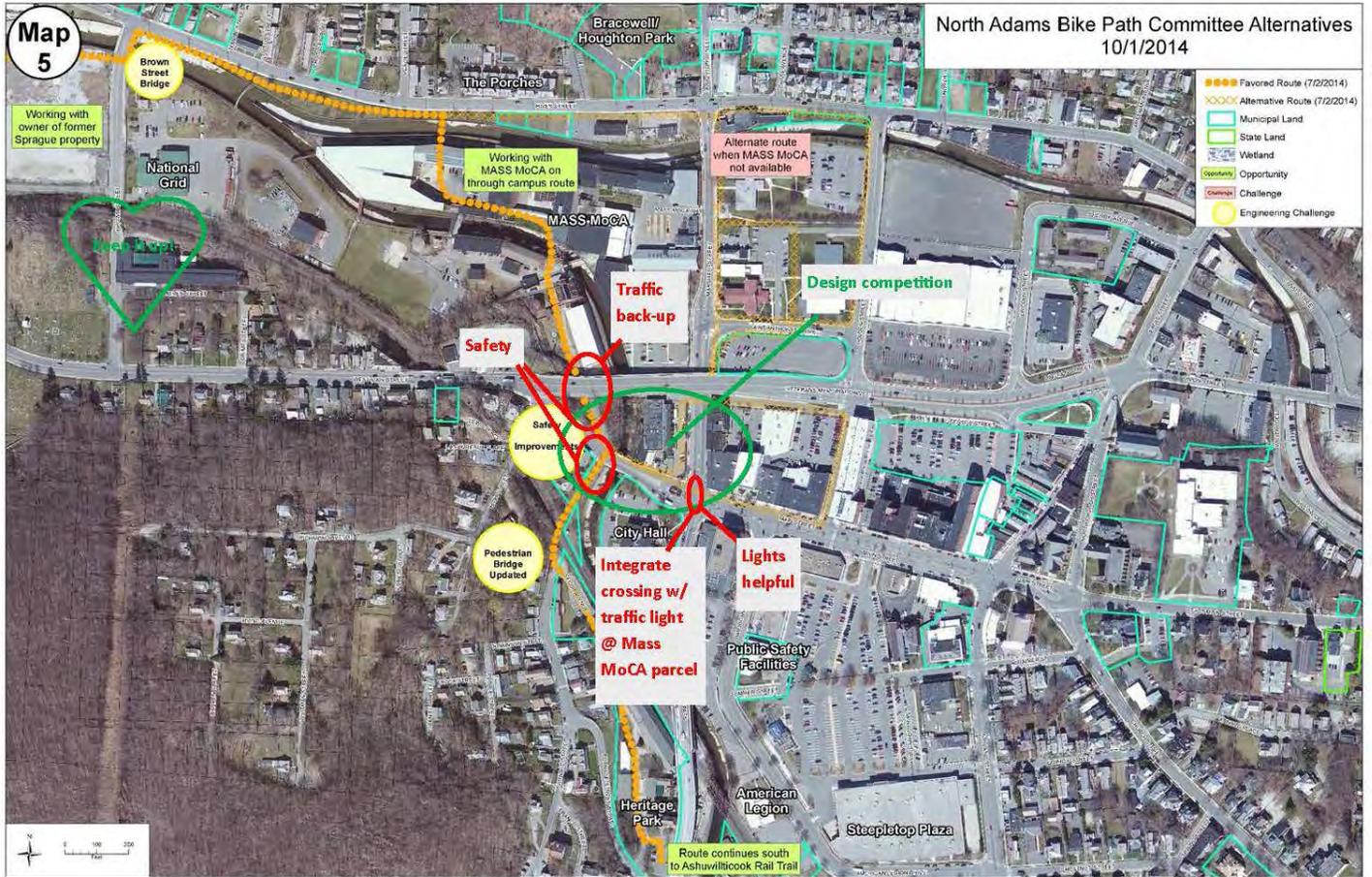
*After crossing the Hoosic River under or along the Sacco bridge, the bike path continues along the Hoosic River meander.*



A participant recommended emulating the Hinsdale Cartoon Bridge at the potential tunnel under the railroad. Another participant noted the good scenery and great view along the existing service road.

# MAP 5

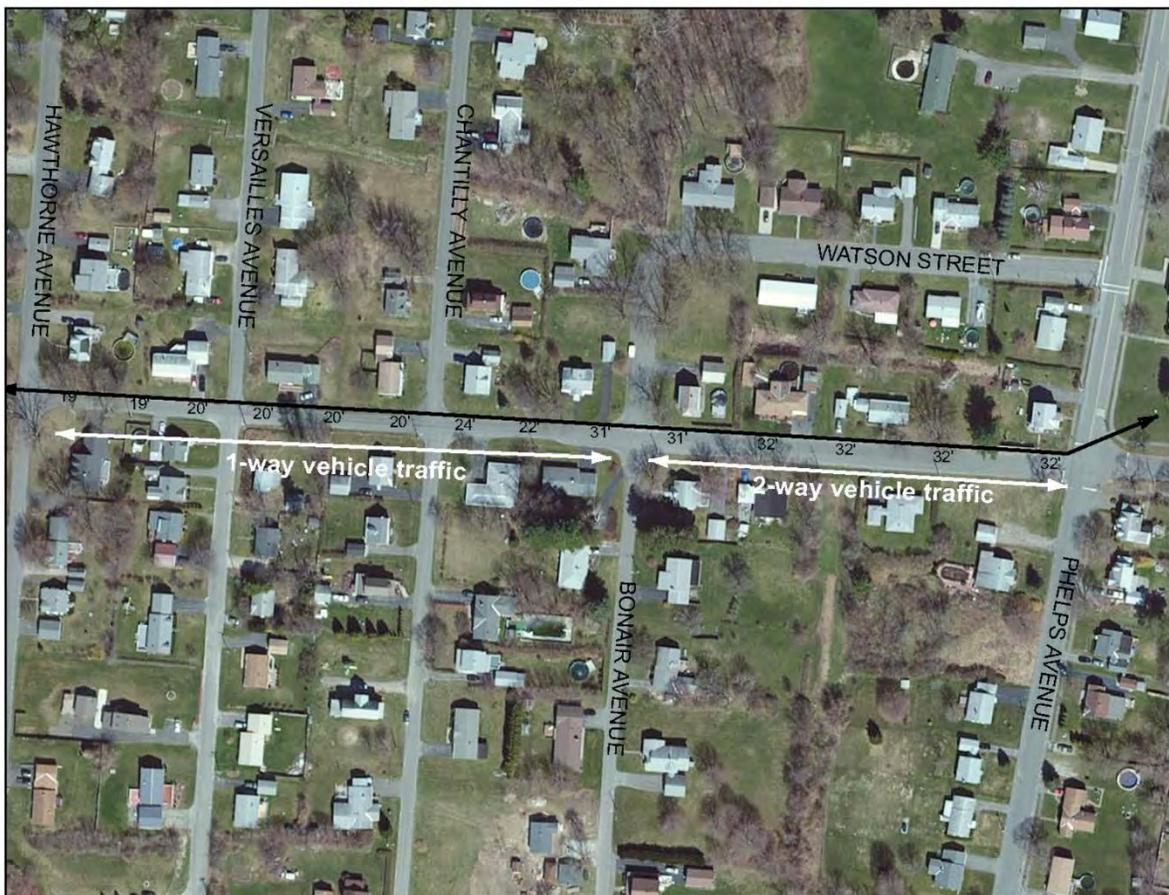
The proposed route culminates at Heritage State Park, passing through or along the Mass MoCA property and bringing pedestrians or bicyclists into North Adams' downtown area.



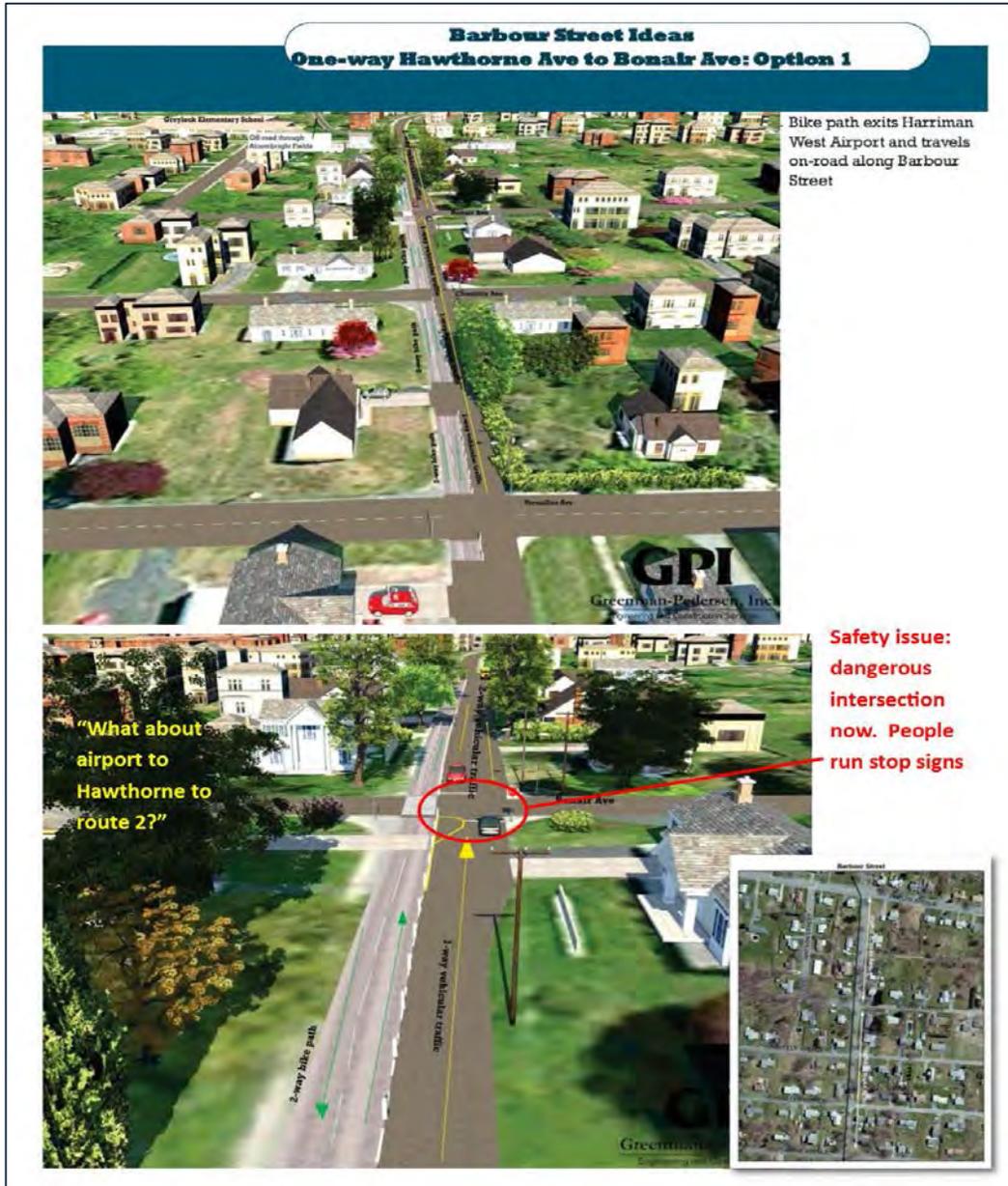
The largest issue in this segment was noted to be safety. Specific areas are noted in red circles. One person suggested a design competition. Lights were suggested to improve safety. Traffic back-up was noted as well.

## BARBOUR STREET DESIGN IDEAS

As the route continues eastward from the airport, it travels on-road along Barbour Street. To meet the goal of being a family-friendly multi-use path, safety measures will be required within the roadway, such as creating dedicated space for the bike/ped path which is distinct from that of the vehicle traveled way. Painting bike lanes with a bicycling icon or with different colors could be considered, creating visual cues that clearly show drivers that the roadway contains a dedicated way for bikers and pedestrians. The aerial view below shows Barbour Street as it travels between Hawthorne and Phelps Avenues. Note that the three western blocks of Barbour Street between Hawthorne and Chantilly Avenues are narrower than the eastern block. To avoid widening the roadway and encroaching upon front yard space, the western three blocks could be converted to one-way streets, where the road would have one lane for vehicle traffic and use the rest of the roadway for the bike path. The eastern block between Bonair and Phelps Avenues is wide enough to accommodate two-way vehicle traffic and a new bike/ped path.



Using the one-way scenario, residents were offered two design options to consider. Option 1 would keep one lane open to one-way vehicle traffic and transform the other lane into a dedicated two-way pedestrian/bike path. Option 2 would create a one-way vehicle traffic lane lined on both sides with one-way bike/ped lanes. The bike/ped lane to the right of the vehicle lane would travel the same direction as vehicle traffic and the lane to the left of vehicles would travel against traffic.



The comments made on the Barbour Street scenario posters indicated that safety is already a large concern at intersections along the street. The Bonair-Barbour Street intersection and the Versailles Avenue-Barbour Street intersection were noted to be dangerous. It was specifically stated that the stop signs at the Versailles Avenue-Barbour Street intersection are not adhered to. Consideration of a bike/ped path along Barbour would have to add safety measures to reduce risk of accidents.



## MAJOR FINDINGS

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Staff reported that no one stated an opposition to the creation of a bike/ped path between the North Adams and Williamstown and, in fact, all who spoke to staff voiced support for such a path. It was viewed as an asset to both communities that will provide recreational, economic development and transportation benefits. Residents from neighboring communities attended the Open House to show support for additional bike/ped paths in the county. Residents from Adams who live near the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail shared their positive experiences with the trail and hoped that it would extend northward to North Adams and Williamstown. Attending members of the Berkshire Bike Path Council view the bike/ped path as a contributing section of a pathway that will travel the length of the county, from the Connecticut to the Vermont border and beyond.

There were several residents who voiced their concerns about the route traveling through their neighborhoods or in close proximity to their properties or homes. The main concern for these residents are loss of privacy and a reduction in personal safety. Residents on Barbour Street believe the quiet character of the neighborhood would be compromised by having high numbers of walkers and bicyclists traveling in front of their homes where now there are few. Residents in the Greylock section of the city are also concerned about a decrease in privacy and a sharp increase in the number of people drawn to the area. The proposed route in this neighborhood is currently wooded, and flooding and disruption of wildlife habitat was also stated as a concern.

## NEXT STEPS

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The City of North Adams and BRPC will continue to engage the public, and will reach out to the neighborhoods through which the bike path is proposed to pass. During the winter of 2014-15 planners will meet with neighborhood groups and landowners along to hear residents' questions, concerns and suggestions. This interaction will continue throughout the design process of the project. The main contacts for the project are:

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413 442-1521, ext. 35

Mackenzie Greer, City Planner  
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North Adams City Hall, 10 Main St.  
North Adams, MA  
413-622-3000 ext. 3266

**INSERT PRESENTATION HERE**