

Mt Airy Forest – Community Trail Discussion
February 11th, 2020

The Cincinnati Park Board hosted a community meeting at the McKie Recreation Center in Northside to discuss trails in Mt. Airy Forest. Approximately 50 to 60 people attended and represented trail runners, hikers, equestrians, cyclists and generally people who cared about Mt. Airy Forest.

There was a brief presentation given that included trail maps of the park, basic objectives of the Park Board, future trail plans and trail connections both around Mt. Airy and regionally and a proposal for a new bike riding skills park proposed for the park. The presentation also addressed trail construction standards and depicted typical existing trail conditions and trail signs.

Park Board objectives included the following:

- Increasing access for all user groups
- Maintaining/renovating/constructing trails sustainably and without damaging natural resources
- Attracting more trail use
- Responding to trail needs of diverse users
- Respecting the park's historic and natural character

After the presentation, the group broke into smaller groups at separate tables to discuss their concerns. The groups were given the following questions to consider:

1. What are the biggest trail needs, issues, and opportunities?
2. Are there existing trail user conflicts? Where? How should they be managed?
3. If multi-use trails (including off-road bike use) were to be expanded in the park where do you feel those opportunities exist?
4. Should new trail construction be considered, and if so, where?
5. What are your feelings regarding the proposed bike skills facility?
6. What measures can be implemented to maintain trails in a cost-effective way?

There was lively discussion at the four smaller groups and key concerns included conflicting uses that could result in safety issues, loss of the enjoyment of nature (peace and quiet), people observing trail etiquette, if and where mountain bikes should be allowed in the park beyond the current off-road bike trail, use of trails in wet weather, attracting more people and traffic to the park, encouraging more use and more diverse use of the park and its trails, providing opportunities for youth to learn new bike skills, access to bridle trails, and providing better directional signs along trails. Trail conditions and trail maintenance were also of concern.

The following is a list of the concerns and comments from participants:

- Consider a phased approach to trail improvements
- Water management and erosion control were significant challenges
- Signs needed throughout the park
- Trails should be named and signed

- Trail maps are needed and maps and trail markers should be color coded
- Think about a “Land Bridge” across I-74 to reconnect the two sides of the park
- Mountain bike/hikers/dog conflicts
- Concern about the speed of cyclists on trails and cyclists not observing proper trail etiquette
- Trails should be Dog-friendly
- Keep Equestrian trails – Make horse trailer parking available at end of Diehl Rd.
- Support bridle trail access from adjacent Green Township Park
- Connect up trails on both sides of park. Trail system seems segmented.
- Improving/Fixing the neglect of trail – But do not completely remove “natural” element
- Increased use means increased maintenance
- Trails should be open more often
- Increase opportunities for volunteers/others to help maintain trails
- Improved signage and maps to show usable options and skill levels (bikes, horses, humans)
- Education on trails, use, rules
- Lots of “swamps” – wet areas where sections of trail are located
- Access trails as much as possible and not sanitize trails
- What is Cincinnati Park Board (CPB) capability to maintain existing hiking trails?
- Consider locating skills park near the existing mountain bike trails or in open areas along Trail Ridge Road or at Colerain entrance
- How will students in low income communities afford mountain bikes and access trails?
- City police canine training happening often in area 12
- Lots of honeysuckle, invasives, trail neglect, happening on west side of park
- Leash law not being enforced
- Concern about longevity of maintaining with volunteers – Could volunteers focus on invasive removal in coordinated way with CPB staff
- Deer culling is an issue for trail access/awareness
- Consider locating bike riding skill course closer to elementary school – needs access to bikes
- Existing hiking trails good for technical training – but needs maintenance
- Mt. Airy is important greenspace for wildlife
- Need more coordinated effort for master plan of Mt. Airy – no one seems to be in charge of able to see the ‘whole’ picture
- Concern about herbicide spraying in park – specifically from back of truck
- Trails need good sightlines for safety
- There should be increased access especially for new user groups including adaptive cycling
- There are overall park needs for parking, picnicking and restrooms

- Nature trails should be accessible in all conditions
- Big needs include sustainable trails, community education and the proposed skills park that neighborhood kids can access
- Trails should be shared but there should not be use in wet weather which damages trails
- MSD should repair damage they caused with recent sewer construction
- Look at ways to connect proposed cycling skills park to existing mountain bike trail
- Trail #13 is slipping into creek
- Proposed site for cycling skills park at Area #23 could bring bikes on to the hiking trail there and this is a safety concern
- Mountain bikers already have plenty of other trails to use in the area and which are sited on more stable soils

At the completion of small group discussion, highlights of these comments were presented to the full group. Next steps were explained which include reporting back on the meeting results, developing a trails master plan, refining that plan including more community engagement, and then presenting the plan at a future Park Board public meeting.