

TOWN OF CONCORD

JUNCTION VILLAGE OPEN SPACE PLANNING STUDY

**FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE CONCORD
COMMUNITY PRESERVATION FUND**

Prepared for

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SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

Project Background

Created by a special act of the legislature in 2006, the Concord Housing Development Corporation is a local non-profit group tasked by the Concord Select Board with investigating and implementing alternatives for the provision of affordable housing in Concord. In 2013, the Concord Housing Development Corporation (CHDC) acquired 12.8 acres of land from the Massachusetts State Department of Corrections. The land is located at the end of Winthrop Street in West Concord and set behind the present day Massachusetts Correctional Institute facility on Route 2.

The site is deed restricted to be used exclusively for the development of affordable housing and creation of public open space, approximately 5.5-6.5 acres of the site will be available for open space use with the remainder for affordable housing development. Located along the banks of the Assabet River and the future Bruce Freeman Rail Trail, and within a short walk to West Concord Village, the setting is ideal for a combined use of open space and affordable housing.

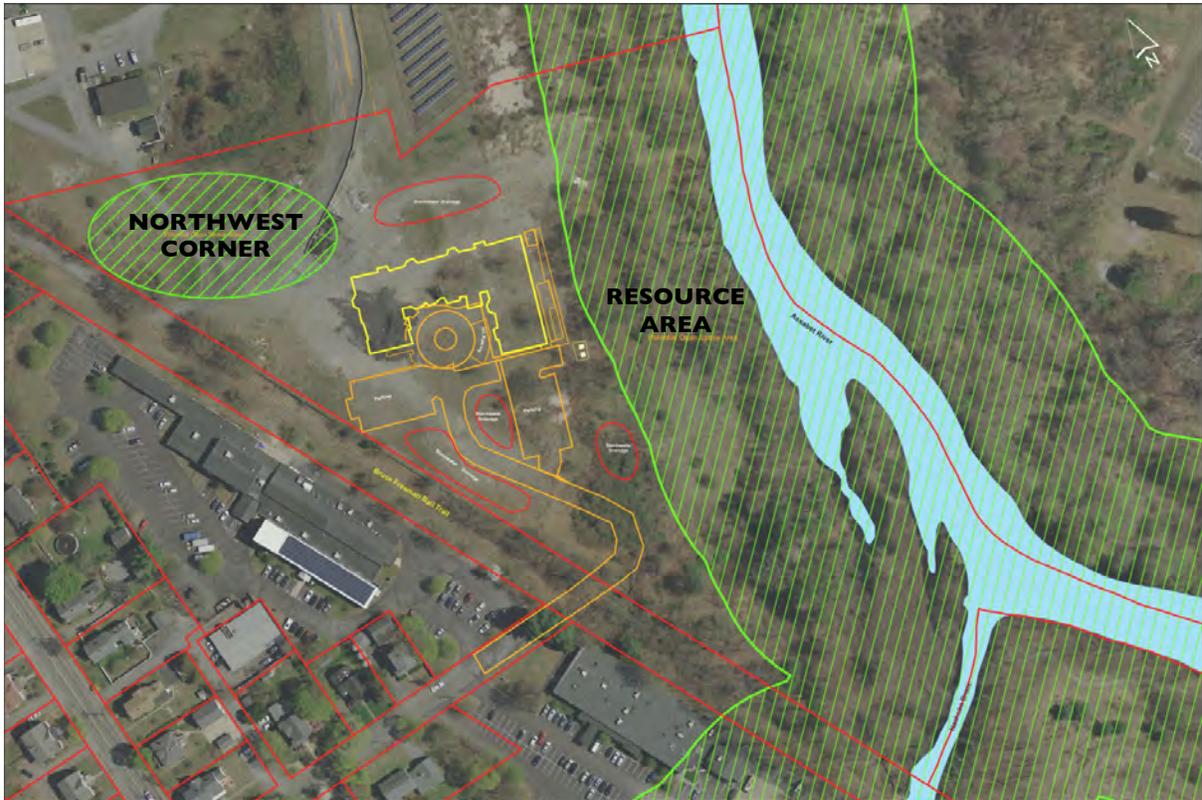
After issuing an RFP for affordable housing development proposals for the Junction Village site in 2014, the CHDC selected the Grantham Group of Marlborough, MA to develop an affordable assisted living facility with 83 affordable units. The developer plans to seek a Comprehensive Permit. Grantham Group would own and maintain the facility and the CHDC will retain ownership of the land and any associated management responsibilities not related to the building. CHDC plans to delegate management of the open space to another entity with expertise in open space management.

Study Purpose & Process

The purpose of Junction Village Open Space Plan is to give insight and guidance to the CHDC as it moves forward with plans to create public open space at the site. Through research across Town planning documents and meetings with stakeholders and community members, this plan intends to identify the most feasible and popular uses of the site. Its proximity to a walkable commercial district, a regional recreation network, and a federally-recognized river, makes it a dynamic site with potential to provide Concord residents and visitors with passive recreational opportunities and to become an asset to the neighborhood.

Over the course of two months, the CHDC worked with consultant JM Goldson community preservation + planning to identify opportunities and obstacles in utilizing the open space portion of the site for public recreational purposes. Through interviews with Town employees, Town committee members, and community advocates for open space and seniors, the consultant identified potential open space uses of the site. The consultant led two community events to inform this study: a site walk for neighbors and abutters and a community site walk and workshop. The purpose of the events was to introduce participants to the site and its possibilities, and to gauge interest in the potential open space uses.

During the workshop, participants used a map of the site (created by the Town of Concord) that identified two possible areas for open space use. See site map on following page.



Brief Summary of Study Results

Despite some remaining questions about how the assisted living facility will be sited, connections to public water or on-site sewage management, traffic and parking, participants considered uses for two areas of the site, the Resource Area and the Northwest Corner. Participants were interested in:

Trails: Participants prefer trails including connections to the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail and loops of different lengths and materials for users of various abilities over all other uses.

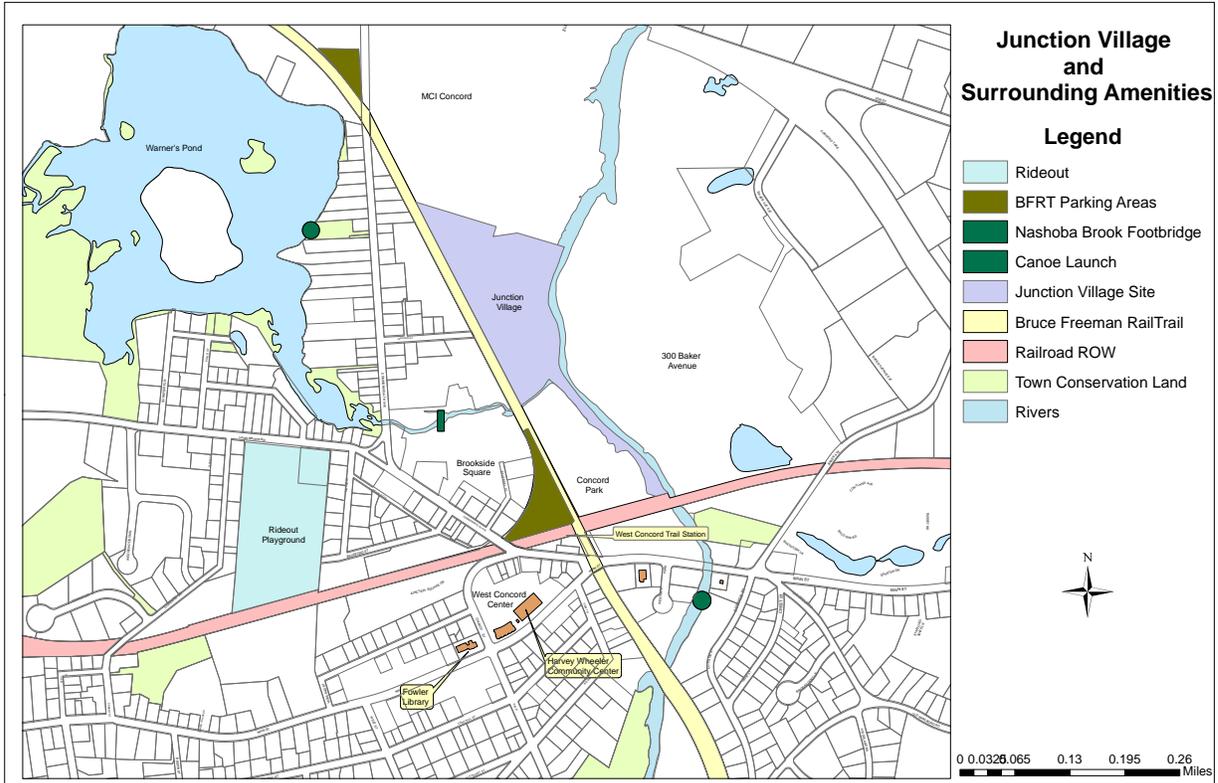
Habitat protection/enhancement: Participants favored uses that would have the least impact on wildlife habitat and development that would enhance biodiversity and the natural setting, like a natural meadow and invasive plant removal.

Access: Increased traffic and parking demand have already been a big part of the conversation about developing this site. These concerns were fresh in the minds of participants and shaped their attitudes about proposed uses.

SECTION 2

SITE DESCRIPTION AND CONTEXT

Located in West Concord on the south side of the Massachusetts Correctional Institute (MCI) at Concord prison, a medium security facility which houses 570 male inmates¹, the Junction Village site encompasses +/- 12.8 acres of land. The Department of Correction used the site for sewage disposal and the Town also stored aggregate material at the site. The site has many qualities that recommend it as open space—it is bordered by the Assabet River and the future Bruce Freeman Rail Trail, and it is within a quarter mile of the West Concord Village business district.



Surrounding Neighborhood Context

Access to the site is from Winthrop Street, a short street with mixed residential and light industrial uses. The site is zoned Industrial Park A (IPA), and is bordered by West Concord Industrial (WCI) and Residential C (RC) to the southwest, and Limited Business (LB) to the south².

Village Junction is less than ¼ mile from the center of West Concord Village, a vibrant business district that is serviced by the MBTA commuter rail. It is possible to walk to the Village by crossing through a parking lot

¹ Executive Office of Public Safety and Security. <http://www.mass.gov/eopss/law-enforce-and-cj/prisons/doc-facilities/mci-concord.html>. accessed May 16, 2016.

² Town of Concord. Concord MA Public Webmap. <https://www.mapsonline.net/concordma/index.html>. accessed May 16, 2016.

on the southwestern side of the site and then crossing the Nashoba Brook Bakery footbridge over Nashoba Brook.

The Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) will connect towns from Lowell to Sudbury along an old B&M railroad right of way. The trail will run the length of the western Junction Village property line and will provide access to the Junction Village open space site. After the Concord BRFT section is completed (construction is projected to begin in 2017), pedestrians and cyclists will be able to travel south from the Junction Village site using the old rail bridge over Nashoba Brook into West Concord, or north towards Acton.

The site is also within walking distance of the Rideout Park which is slated for updates beginning in 2017³. Rideout Park has basketball and tennis courts, a playground as well as a walking path and will add adult exercise equipment as part of the 2017 updates. In addition, the park has seasonal restrooms and will have a total of fifty-six parking spaces once renovations are completed in 2017.

Physical Description of Site

The site is a wedge-shaped parcel that is bordered by the Assabet River to the south and east, MCI Concord to the North, and a mixed residential and light industrial neighborhood to the west. In the future, the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail will run the length of the western property border. The property is generally flat but slopes slightly to the east and the river. No bedrock outcrops are present on the site. These characteristics contribute to the site's development feasibility.

Along the southern and eastern portions of the site that border the Assabet River, there is thick vegetation including trees, bushes and vines. Trees include oak and Norway maples. Some of the native trees are quite large and impressive though many are compromised by overgrowth of grape vine. This area is overgrown with invasive species like bittersweet, Japanese knotweed, garlic mustard and honeysuckle. The topography throughout this portion of the site is undulating and rolling due to past storage of aggregate material by the Town. The soil is also mixed heavily with sand. Remnants of the former prison leaching fields are located in this area.

The river sits below a steep bluff that runs from the northeastern section of the site to the southeast. At the southeastern most portion of the riverfront, the grade slopes more gently down to the river and into low wetland scrub vegetation. From the riverbank, one can see the other side of the river which is undeveloped. This portion of the Assabet River has a federal Wild and Scenic designation. Beyond the 200' riverfront buffer, the land is flat and undeveloped.

³ Interview. Assistant Town Manager, Kate Hodges. May 6, 2016

SECTION 3

DEVELOPMENT CONSTRAINTS AND PLANNING CONTEXT

Physical Constraints

At present, it is unclear whether or not the facility will require its own on-site wastewater treatment or connect to Town sewer. The final siting of the building, parking, and possible waste water treatment may impact the use of the site for open space. Thoughtful siting of the building may enhance the connectivity and seamless use of the site for open space.

Setback from Prison Wall

The building is subject to a required 250' setback from the prison wall.

Topography

The undulating nature of the woodlands along the river may affect trail development. If trails are to be ADA accessible, they may have to be leveled or routed around these rolling areas. And leveling of the site for trail construction would require approvals from the Natural Resources Commission.

Assabet River

The bluff above the river is very steep and quite tall (approximately 15' above the water). This poses a threat of bank erosion with intensive use and safety concerns with visitors approaching the river or walking along these banks.

Invasive Plants

The wooded portion of the site is severely overgrown with invasive plants like Japanese knotweed, garlic mustard, and bittersweet among others. Without an inventory to determine the extent of invasive growth and a plan to remove and prevent re-establishment, invasive plants could overwhelm the native plants and trees already there.

Regulatory Constraints

The site is subject to a variety of local, state and federal regulatory constraints because of its riverfront location, wetlands, floodplains, and the Assabet's federal Wild and Scenic River designation as well as its proximity to a state prison.

Federal Regulations

Wild and Scenic River Act

Created by Congress in 1968, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act protects certain rivers throughout the country that "possess outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural or other similar values."⁴ The goal of the act is to promote the use of the river in compliance with that river's use plan. Congress designated 29 miles of the Sudbury, Assabet and Concord rivers as Wild and Scenic in 1999, including a 4.4-mile segment of the Assabet River beginning 1,000 feet downstream from the Damonmill Dam in West Concord, to its confluence with the Sudbury River at Egg Rock in Concord.

⁴ The Sudbury, Assabet and Concord Wild and Scenic River Stewardship Council. <http://www.sudbury-assabet-concord.org/the-rivers/ws-rivers>. accessed May 19, 2016.

“This Act recognizes 29 free-flowing miles of these three rivers for their outstanding ecology, history, scenery, recreation values, and place in American literature. Located about 25 miles west of Boston, the rivers are remarkably undeveloped and provide recreational opportunities in a natural setting to several million people living in the greater Boston metropolitan area.”

Section 7 of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act states that no department or agency of the US government shall recommend authorization of a water resources project that would have a direct and adverse effect on the values for which a Wild and Scenic river was designated. This Section provides the authority for the administering agency, in this case the National Park Service, in partnership with the River Stewardship Council (RSC), to review federal projects on and along the designated segment to ensure that they meet this standard. To date, a federal water resources project had been interpreted to mean a project on or along the river that requires a permit (e.g., wastewater discharge permit, dredge and fill permit) and/or has received federal funds to support the project.

Additionally, the National Park Service, in partnership with the RSC, is more broadly responsible for the protection of the outstanding resource values of the river. Section 10 (a) of the Act states: “In such administration primary emphasis shall be given to protecting its aesthetic, scenic, historic, archaeological, and scientific features. Management plans for any such component may establish varying degrees of intensity for its protection and development, based on the special attributes of the area.” Guided by the River Conservation Plan, the National Park Service and the RSC work to advise, educate and advocate for the river with local citizens, in the community and at the state and federal level.

State Regulations

Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act

The purpose of Massachusetts' Wetlands Protection Act (MGL Chapter 131 ~40) is to create a public review and decision-making process for activities that may affect Areas Subject to Protection and therefore require regulation to protect drinking water, wildlife habitat, fisheries, or to prevent pollution and storm water damage, for example. The Wetlands Protection Act provides a uniform process and set of standards to municipalities across the Commonwealth though municipalities may choose to add even greater restriction on wetland development through their own wetlands bylaws.

Local Regulations

Concord Wetlands Bylaw

The purpose of the Town of Concord Wetlands Bylaw is to protect the Town of Concord's wetlands, water resources, flood prone areas, and adjoining upland areas including three major rivers, the Assabet, Sudbury, and Concord and their tributaries. The bylaw is subject to and informed by the state's Wetlands Protection Act and also adds additional layers of protection and scrutiny.

Because of the Village Junction property's proximity to the Assabet River, it encompasses a 100' Wetland Buffer zone, a 200' Riverfront Buffer zone, as well as a 25' No Build Zone. These designations require a permit and review by the Town's Natural Resource Commission for any proposed construction or alteration to the resource. The prohibition of activity within these zones is suspended for removal of invasive plant species, removal of dying trees or live trees not more than 6" in diameter, planting of native trees and plants and “vista pruning” which removes plants or trees to create a view to the river at a distance of at least 50' from the high water mark⁵.

⁵ Town of Concord. **Wetlands By-law**. Approved September 23, 2013.

Work proposed through this study (such as construction of trails and installation of benches) will require a Request for Determination of Applicability of proposed work to the Commission which will determine if the work triggers the state's Wetlands Protection Act. Addition or removal of fill, leveling of the ground, and removal of vegetation or any alteration that may impact erosion or drainage will all trigger the permitting or Notice of Intent process. The Commission shall presume that any alteration to the resource will have adverse effects unless the applicant can prove through presentation of credible evidence combined with mitigation measures, that the resource will be protected and/or enhanced.

Floodplain and Wetlands Conservancy Districts

A small portion of the site lies within both the Floodplain and Wetlands Conservancy Districts. These districts were created to add another layer of regulatory review in areas of environmental importance. The purpose of the Floodplain Conservancy District is to restrict development in areas where there is a high potential for flooding and damage to property or danger to people. Work that may impact the floodplain is subject to a request for a Special Permit. The Wetlands Conservancy District designation alerts the Town to the presence of wetlands and compliance with the State's Wetlands Protection Act. The proposed location of the affordable assisted living facility is outside of these areas.

Planning Context

The use of open space at Junction Village should fit into a larger planning context and set of goals as outlined in relevant planning documents including the 2015 Concord Open Space and Recreation Plan, the 2008 West Concord Village Master Plan, and the 1995 Sudbury, Assabet and Concord River Wild and Scenic River Study: River Conservation Plan. These documents provide insight about local open space needs and goals. Themes across the plans include connectivity and access.

Connectivity and access: Develop a trail network for transportation and nature-based recreation. Increase access to trails and overall walkability of the Town by connecting trails to Town centers and also increase access to natural resources and scenic areas.

2015 Open Space and Recreation Plan

Concord's 2015 Open Space Plan reflects the community's desire to identify, complete, and connect walking and biking trails, including handicapped accessible trails. Residents recognize the positive impact the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail will have on the community and want to expand on the connectivity and access it will engender, seeing it as a central trail with other walking or biking trails connected to it.

When polled regarding their desires for future initiatives, community members encouraged the Town to focus on its already rich resources in trail networks and to make these more accessible through trail maps and guides, but also to consider extending sidewalks and developing rail trails, which provide safe passage without direct conflict with vehicular traffic. Additional goals identified in the Plan pertinent to Village Junction open space include creating more community gardens and a dog park, invasive plant control and improved handicapped accessibility on Town trails.

West Concord Village Master Plan

The 2009 West Concord Village Master Plan offers a lot of useful ideas about how to integrate Village Junction open space into the West Concord community. One goal identified in the plan is to create opportunities for community engagement by increasing opportunities for all age groups through

development of family friendly meeting places, improved access to natural resources, enhanced active and passive recreation facilities, and places for arts and civic events.

Another goal of the Master Plan is to increase connectivity between open and green spaces within an understandable pedestrian network. In addition, residents expressed a desire to see undeveloped or underused parcels along the old railway developed or improved. Finally, residents approved strategies about how to enhance access to the Village's water resources, Nashoba Brook and the Assabet River:

THE VILLAGE GRAPHIC MASTER PLAN ILLUSTRATES AND RECOMMENDS A NEW TRAIL ALONG THE SOUTH SIDE OF NASHOBA BROOK . . . CONNECTING TO THE FUTURE BRUCE FREEMAN RAIL TRAIL. THIS TRAIL WOULD . . . CONNECT WITH A NEW TRAIL SYSTEM PROPOSED ALONG THE WESTERN SIDE OF THE ASSABET RIVER . . . THE EXISTING TRAIL ALONG THE WEST SIDE FROM THE OBSERVATION AREA AT CONCORD PARK WOULD LINK TO A NEW PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE OVER THE RIVER CONNECTING TO THE BAKER AVENUE EXTENSION BUSINESS PARK.

Concord River Wild and Scenic River Study: River Conservation Plan

River Stewardship Council (RSC) developed the River Conservation Plan in 1995 in anticipation of a proposed federal Wild and Scenic designation which was applied in 1999. The purpose of the plan was to outline management standards for the land, watershed and water resources within the waterway with particular emphasis on creating a management framework across public and privately owned resources.

The RSC is tasked with protecting the river's wildlife habitat, recreation and scenic values in cooperation with owners of both public and privately held parcels. As noted in the consultant's interview with a member of the RSC, involving the RSC in any proposed development along the river at the outset will offer the CHDC access to the expertise of the RSC as well as foster a relationship of cooperation and partnership which is the core purpose of the River Conservation Plan.

SECTION 4

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The consultant used a variety of means to solicit public input about the potential uses for the open space portion of the land at Junction Village. These means included a site walk for neighbors, and a community workshop and site walk, plus interviews with key stakeholders.

Site Walk with Neighbors

Neighbors and other interested community members were invited to the site walk which took place on May 2, 2016. The consultant along with members of the CHDC met participants at 8:30AM and fourteen people participated. The group walked the site with the consultant stopping along the way to point out property boundaries and unique features of the site. The group observed the river, the mix of vegetation and topography.

The purpose of the walk was to provide neighbors with an opportunity to see the property and gain on-the-ground understanding. With the level of opposition to the affordable housing development within the neighborhood, it was important to show neighbors how the site could become a neighborhood amenity as well as offer them a forum to express their concerns ahead of the community-wide meeting. Participants carried small cards with them on which to keep notes and make comments which were given to the consultant at the conclusion of the walk. Comments included the following:

- A path for walking along the river (keeping the woods)
- I'd like to see if we can blaze a trail south to the BRFT (along the river)
- Walkability connections & walking path to the river
- Parking-this will help persuade voters

Stakeholder Interviews

Objectives

By interviewing people from across different sectors of Town government, committees and activities, the interviews provided a snap shot of opinions about what uses are best suited to the Village Junction site. In addition, the interviews provided insight and ideas across a broad spectrum of expertise. The purpose of the interviews was to learn more about the site including permitted uses, permitting, and community needs.

Methods

The CHDC provided a list of interview contacts that would provide unique insight or perspective on the proposed project. Interviewees included town employees from the Division of Natural Resources, the Council on Aging and the Recreation Department, members of the Planning Board and the West Concord Advisory Committee, as well as a landscape architect, a manager of a local assisted living facility, and a leader in local river stewardship. The interviews took place in person and over the phone between April 27, and May 6, 2016. Questions were not uniform and reflected the areas of knowledge of the interviewees.

Interview Results

Possible Uses

Depending on the ultimate size of the site, there are a variety of options for its development. Because the site has riverfront, wetland and flat open space, possible uses are again varied. Interviewees emphasized the need to reduce parking demand and increased traffic in the area to reduce friction with neighbors.

Interviewees also noted that walkability from West Concord to the site would be a positive benefit. How can the site be integrated into existing cycling, walking and water trail networks?

Proposed uses are ranked below according to how much support or interest they received from interviewees.

- 1. Walking trails:** This was the most popular option. It would offer users an opportunity to enjoy the view of Assabet River which has a federal Wild and Scenic designation. The trails could be linked to other proposed trails along the Assabet and would offer a nature experience to neighborhood residents and West Concord Village visitors. In addition, the trails would offer outdoor activities for senior residents of Village Junction and a place for their visitors to spend time with them. Looping trails with options of varying lengths are most accessible to seniors. Frequent benches encourage use by seniors. Picnic areas and enhanced wildlife viewing areas are also important.
- 2. Community garden:** A community garden would provide opportunities for Junction Village residents to garden if the beds were raised to waist height. There are raised beds of this type at Concord Park and they are well used. Additionally, neighbors from Brookside Square or 95 Conant St. who do not have access to garden space might be interested in having a community garden within walking distance. Raised beds may be necessary across the garden as soil remediation of a suspected brownfield site would be an expensive and lengthy process.
- 3. Boat put-in:** There are two possible sites for creating a boat launch or fishing site. The first is in the southeast corner of the site, a flat wetlands section for a boardwalk. The second is at the top of the bluff on the northern portion of the river. The site is almost equidistant to two other boat launch sites, up and down stream. Interviewees thought this would be a good spot for another launch though again the question of parking came up.
- 4. Fishing platform or wildlife viewing deck:** Concord Outfitters in West Concord raises funds to stock the Assabet with fish annually. The river is a popular fishing spot and a platform on the northern bluff or a boardwalk to the river would provide fishing access. A similar structure could be used for wildlife viewing as well.
- 5. Natural meadow:** This would be an excellent use in the open flat area of the site. Once established, it could provide excellent habitat for wildlife and pollinators and would require minimal maintenance, perhaps mowing once or twice a year. It would be expensive to bring in soil and would take 3-5 years to establish.
- 6. Adult exercise equipment:** Exercise equipment that is geared toward adults with both full and limited mobility were supported. As an amenity to the residents of the assisted living facility, this idea received a lot of support. There is equipment that enhances balance and hand-eye coordination and provides gentle therapy for hips, shoulders and knees. These are generally low cost (compared to children's playground equipment).
- 7. Dog park:** There are many places in Concord where people can walk their dogs and it is not clear if there is a demand for a dog park, plus a dog park could trigger a need for parking. It is also unclear what the maintenance demands would be as waste management would certainly be necessary.
- 8. Playground:** Interviewees noted that Rideout playground is very close to the Village Junction site and fulfills this community need.
- 9. Playing fields:** These were seen as positive additions to the community but the need for additional parking triggered by this use limited enthusiasm. In addition, the cost of construction on such a degraded site would be prohibitive, as would cost of maintenance on one or two isolated fields.

The site will require improvements to make any of these uses possible, from trail or dock construction to tree removal to delivery of soil and plant material. There may be significant expense associated with these ideas. It was suggested that a phased approach could help to offset to the outlay of funds.

Connectivity

With the construction of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) slated to begin in 2017, and other trails along the Assabet River under development, the Village Junction open space could add another connection point. The Concord Park assisted living facility across the river has a small circuit of trails around its building. These could be linked with Village Junction trails using the bridge at the Nashoba Brook Bakery, or the future BFRT bridge. Pedestrian improvements along Laws Brook Road (to begin spring 2017) will provide safe pedestrian access to the site from the western side of the Village and Rideout playground.

Parking

As West Concord grows, the demand for parking increases as well. This is already a topic of concern within the Village and interviewees expressed an interest in using the open space in a way that will minimize demand for additional parking.

Permitting

Recreational improvements to the site may trigger review processes by the Natural Resources Committee (NRC) or the Sudbury-Assabet- Concord Wild and Scenic River Stewardship Council (RSC). Removal of trees requires approval by the NRC as would construction of trails or boat dock or fishing platform. Any project within the 200' riverfront river zone must provide a "net benefit to the environment" meaning removal of trees must be offset by tree replacement. Removal of invasives, which is a problem across town, can substitute for tree replacement. The slope of the wetland is an important consideration for the NRC when reviewing proposals. The benefit to the public of the proposed use is also a consideration. Any construction in this zone would require a Notice of Intent be sent to the NRC.

The Village Junction site abuts the Assabet along a portion that is federally designated Wild and Scenic. The purpose of the Wild and Scenic designation is to "preserve the character" of a river and development along the river is not discouraged but must ensure the river's free flow and protect its "outstanding features." The National Park Service and the RSC have the authority to review federal projects along the river that may impact these standards. These projects include anything that requires a federal permit or uses federal funding. The river steward we interviewed noted that any construction of a dock or boardwalk would involve construction performed by the Army Corps of Engineers and would therefore trigger "Section 7" review (the NPS and RSC review).

In the eastern US, Wild and Scenic rivers are managed using a partnership model, with permitting agencies and private landowners working together to enhance and protect the river. With this in mind, the RSC would like to be kept abreast of proposals on this site that might impact the river. Their knowledge of the river will be a valuable asset as the project moves forward.

Infrastructure developments

Trails should be accessible and navigable to Junction Village residents. Accessibility includes sloping trails without stairs and minimal grade changes. Stone dust trails with a grade less than 8% can be ADA accessible however stone dust is more expensive than asphalt. Stone dust offers improved permeability which reduces run-off and thermal pollution, a concern along the riverfront.

Further questions

Interviewees wondered:

- Who will be the managing agency?
- Will there be public restrooms and will any of the uses encourage the use of the site as a “bathroom”?
- How much does each option cost (construction and maintenance)?
- Where will funding come from?

Community Workshop and Site Walk

Summary

Concord residents and abutters have already engaged in discussions about the future Junction Village assisted living facility development but had not had an opportunity to explore the open space possibilities on the site until the Junction Village Open Space workshop. Hosted by the Concord Housing Development Corporation (CHDC), the workshop was an occasion for participants to see the site as well as to examine the potential uses and options for the site.

Despite some remaining questions about how the assisted living facility will be sited, connections to public water or on-site sewage management, traffic and parking, participants considered uses for two areas of the site, the Resource Area and the Northwest Corner. Participants were interested in:

Trails: Participants prefer trails including connections to the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail and loops of different lengths and materials for users of various abilities over all other uses.

Habitat protection/enhancement: Participants favored uses that would have the least impact on wildlife habitat and development that would enhance biodiversity and the natural setting, like a natural meadow and invasive plant removal.

Access: Increased traffic and parking demand have already been a big part of the conversation about developing this site. These concerns were fresh in the minds of participants and shaped their attitudes about proposed uses.

Workshop Design

The Village Junction Open Space Community Workshop was held on Tuesday May 17, 2016 from 6:30-9:00PM, with an optional pre-workshop site walk at 4:45pm. The Concord Housing Development Corporation hosted the workshop, which was facilitated by professional planning consultants from JM Goldson community preservation + planning. The purpose of the workshop was to engage participants in a forum that both informs and solicits ideas. The workshop’s primary objectives were the following:

1. Information: Through a site walk and presentation, the consultants provided information to participants about of the site’s resources.
2. Input: To solicit community input about possible open space uses that could be allowed on the site

Site Walk & Presentation

During the site walk, JM Goldson and members of the CHDC led participants through the site to familiarize them with significant features, the setting, and scale of the site. Representatives from the selected developer, Grantham Group, were also present at the site walk with renderings of the proposed assisted living development and stakes indicating proposed building layout in the field. Participants were able to view the Assabet River and see how the future Bruce Freeman Rail Trail will connect with the site. Senator Michael J. Barrett and Representative Cory Atkins attended the site walk. Seventeen people attended the site walk, thirteen of whom also participated in the workshop.

Upon returning from the site walk, participants joined other attendees and gathered together at tables in groups of five to six. Thirty-eight people participated in the workshop. The first part of the workshop consisted of an introduction by Philip Posner, CHDC co-chair, and a presentation by Jennifer M. Goldson, principal planner at JM Goldson which oriented participants to the location, environmental constraints and current and former uses of the site. The consultant briefly described the proposed assisted living facility and how it will be oriented on the site. Representatives from Grantham Group, future developers of the site, were also on hand at the workshop to answer participant's questions and clarify design and building plans. Finally, the consultant described the uses that have been proposed for the the two open space areas—the Resource Area and the Northwest Corner.

Digital Group Polling

As part of the presentation, the consultant included digital group polling. Group polling enables workshop organizers to get a picture of who participants are.

- Almost 56 percent of respondents live in West Concord
- 29 percent both live and work in Concord
- 48 percent were members of Town boards or committees
- 32 percent describe themselves as “interested citizens”
- 87 percent of respondents are personally familiar with the site having either attended the site walk or visiting the site on another occasion

The final question asked participants to choose why they were attending the workshop:

- 25 percent of responses were there “to minimize impacts of development on the neighborhood”
- 25 percent indicated they were there “to gather information/learn more about the site”
- 37 percent were there to ensure protection of natural resources or to enhance public enjoyment of the site
- About 10 percent of respondents attended the workshop in order to maximize benefits to West Concord Village

Small Group Discussion

After the presentation, participants worked for forty-five minutes in small groups, with a member of the CHDC acting as group facilitator. The small groups discussed each proposed use for the two use areas and ranked their opinions about each from Very Appealing to Not Appealing. In addition, a clerk recorded comments and noted areas of consensus or disagreement. An analysis of results is provided below with detailed summaries attached. Finally, the consultant led a discussion of results with facilitators presenting a summary of their group's discussions.

Some participants remain preoccupied by their opposition to the proposed development on the site. In addition to comments and questions made during the workshop, separate comment sheets were available to capture the remarks of these and any other participants who wished to express concerns about the proposed housing development.

Some participants questioned the siting of the assisted living facility as presented by the developers. Participants wondered if the building could be sited in a way that could enhance the open space either by creating one contiguous open space rather than two distinct areas. Also, how can storm water management and parking be sited to enhance the open space use, including adding two or three dedicated parking spaces? How can the the view of the storm water management and the prison be minimized?

Small Group Discussion Results

For each of the proposed uses participants noted questions about management and expense, habitat protection, parking and access.

Resource Area

This area includes undisturbed wooded riverfront and wetland along the Assabet River.

Trails (walking/hiking): Very Appealing

Groups expressed the most interest in this use. Participants noted that the trails should be as natural as possible while also being ADA accessible. Some groups proposed looped trails with a more accessible loop close to the assisted living facility and more natural loops closer to the river.

One participant wrote at length about the desire to see a plan for this open space fit into a larger trail network to be developed in the future. The town should look to extend walking paths to Route 2 and south to Westvale Meadow. It should also consider future development along the Assabet and how this site can enhance access to the river and promote it as a community resource.

Trails with associated amenities (Informational signage, benches and picnic tables): Appealing

Groups expressed varying interest in this use. Some agreed that clustered amenities rather than amenities throughout the site would be more appealing, with amenities closer to the BFRT and away from the river. Some groups noted that picnic tables raise the question of trash removal and increased maintenance needs and cost. Most groups favored amenities that would not impede enjoyment of the natural setting or greatly impact its natural state. One group proposed signs with information about plants and trees and another proposed barcode "signs" that connect with a Smartphone or other device.

Natural/Wild area (no maintained trails; perhaps removal of invasive plants): Appealing

Three groups favored this use in combination with trails or as only a component of the whole use of the site. Groups also expressed interest in promoting biodiversity, removing invasive plants, maintaining trees, and improving wildlife habitat. Two groups preferred this use without

Car-top boat rest stop with boardwalk: Not Appealing

Only one group favored this use. Other groups were concerned about the expense of construction, the need for parking, and disturbance of the natural area, and wondered if there was a need. One group liked the idea of having a naturalized landing, such as one or more large rocks, where boaters could come to shore to picnic or rest.

Fishing platform: Not Appealing

No group approved of this use though one liked the idea of a wildlife viewing platform or blind, a place to observe nature. Other groups didn't see a need or thought the use would raise parking issues.

Northwest Corner

With the exact location of this area not yet determined, participants considered the proposed uses but some noted that re-orientation of the assisted living facility could enhance the connectivity of the open space so that rather than having two separate areas, the space could be connected though with different uses throughout. However, as it stood at the time of the workshop, the area potentially available for open space use was about one acre in the northwest corner of the site abutting the BFRT.

Natural meadow: Very appealing

Groups favored this use because it seems more feasible than some of the other possible uses, improves biodiversity and provides important habitat. In addition, a meadow would provide a plant screen and reduce heat created by Route 2 and the rotary.

Pocket park/Picnic area: Very Appealing

Participants favored this use as an amenity to rail trail users that should include bike racks, a picnic area and benches. One group noted that a pocket park is too groomed and that picnic areas require trash removal. Additionally, the view of the prison should be screened and interpretive signage included.

Community garden: Somewhat Appealing

Some groups responded positively to this use if it would be for local neighbors only and not trigger parking demand and increase traffic. Others questioned the need to provide water and the lack of direct access to the site. It would be challenging for gardeners to bring tools and supplies to the site, unless some parking was provided as part of the assisted living facility parking lot.

Dog park: Not Appealing

This use would increase traffic and parking demand. While one group noted that there might be demand in town, the combination of waste management and increased traffic outweigh any possible benefits.

Playground/Exercise area: Not Appealing

Most groups did not favor this use, particularly because of the increased parking demand. One group proposed a “natural playscape” and another noted that a playground would be a nice amenity for families visiting their loved ones at the assisted living facility.

SECTION 5

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through this planning study process, CHDC has learned from community members that the resource area should be minimally disturbed with construction of nature trails with stone dust or gravel surface that is ADA accessible, and possibly some nonintrusive informational signage and benches as well as invasive plant removal. Design of trails should include circuits of varying length to accommodate users of different abilities. Furthermore, the northwest corner site should be considered for a natural meadow with some minimal amenities to tie into the bike path such as bike racks and benches.

Further consideration should be given to these uses, particularly with regard to site planning, design, relationship to the proposed development (particularly as plans progress), funding, and responsibilities of project implementation, and long-term upkeep and management.

In addition, as development plans for the site progress, possible adjustments to the site plan should be considered to maximize connectivity and public enjoyment of the open space areas. As it stands at the time of this writing, the northwest corner and resource areas have minimal opportunities for connectivity due to the placement of the building, circulation, and parking.

In looking ahead, given that the CHDC's mission is to create and preserve affordable housing, it will be critical for a public or private partner to take the lead for further site planning and implementation.

Master Plan

After plans for the affordable housing development proposal are finalized, the areas available for open space use should be clearly delineated. CHDC or its designee should engage the services of a landscape architect with specialties in designing in ecologically sensitive areas, as well as trails, meadows, and recreational facilities to prepare a master plan for the open space uses of the site.

The master plan should further the work of this study and include a tree inventory, invasive species remediation plan, location and design of trails, meadow, benches, bike racks, and possibly informational signage. Design of trail circulation patterns should be coordinated with access to nearby amenities and connectivity to nearby trails or other recreation amenities, both existing and proposed.

In addition, the master plan should include specifications, estimated costs, phasing recommendations, as appropriate, and a long-term maintenance plan with associated costs. The master plan could also recommend rules and regulations for public use of the property, which could reflect the existing Concord Conservation Land Regulations.

Upon completion of the master plan, the CHDC (or other entity as designated) would be ready to secure funding for construction and installation, then to contract for the work, likely in phases.

Possible Funding/Volunteer Resources

The following is a partial list of possible funding sources and volunteer resources to fund the master plan and development of the open space and recreation amenities. Note, further research should be undertaken to determine additional funding sources.

Concord Community Preservation Act Funds

Established under M.G.L. c. 44B, the Community Preservation Act (CPA) allows Massachusetts cities and towns to raise monies through a surcharge of up to 3% of the tax levy on real property. These funds can be used to acquire, create and preserve open space; acquire, preserve, rehabilitate or restore historic resources; acquire, create, preserve and support community housing; and acquire and preserve land for recreational use. With its 1.5% local CPA surcharge plus a variable distribution from the state CPA Trust Fund, collected about \$1.33M in FY2015.

The CHDC or its designee could request CPA funds to fund a master plan (as described above) and, subsequently, request CPA funds to fund construction of trails, meadow, and associated amenities. The Concord Community Preservation Committee's deadline in 2015 was on October 5 for consideration at Spring Town Meeting. Funding is available July 1 following Town Meeting.

Massachusetts Recreational Trails Program

The Massachusetts Recreational Trails Program generally provides grants ranging from \$2,000 to \$50,000, however, grant proposals will be accepted, considered and awarded for larger amounts up to \$100,000, based on need, breadth and reach of the trail project. The 2016 grant application deadline was on February 1, 2016. <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dcr/services-and-assistance/grants-and-technical-assistance/recreational-trails-grants-program.html>

Massachusetts AmeriCorps

Members of the SCA Massachusetts AmeriCorps program serve Massachusetts's public lands from Martha's Vineyard to the Berkshires each summer completing Conservation Service projects. Projects include new trail construction, invasive plant management, Universal Access Trail construction, school nature trails, historic site reclamation, and more. <https://www.thesca.org/serve/program/massachusetts-corps>

Field Pond Foundation

The primary mission of Field Pond Foundation is to provide financial assistance to nature and land conservation organizations that are community-based and that serve to increase environmental awareness by involving local residents in conservation issues. The Foundation hopes to nurture such efforts by making grants under the following priorities:

1. Project grants for trail making and other enhancement of public access to conservation lands, rivers, coastlines and other natural resources;
2. Land acquisition for conservation;
3. Assistance in establishment of endowments as a means of funding stewardship of newly protected conservation areas; and
4. Directly related education programs and publications as components of a land protection project.

Proposals may be submitted at anytime. Grants range from \$500 to \$25,000 and the Foundation is willing to consider multiple-year grants. <http://fieldspond.org/guidelines.htm>

Eagle Scout Leadership Service Project

The Boy Scouts of America's highest rank is Eagle. Eagle is designed to develop leadership skills and allow Scouts to explore potential careers or hobbies. Scouts must complete a service project to attain the rank of Eagle. The project must benefit an organization and must not be commercial in nature. Service projects, applicable to this endeavor, could include trail construction as well as building benches or kiosks.

Other Volunteer Resources

The Concord-Carlisle High School and the Minute Man High School may have ability to provide student assistance with projects on this site. For example, as part of the "Rivers and Revolution" program at the Concord-Carlisle High School, students participate in Stewardship Projects with local community organizations.

Implementation, Management, and Upkeep

CHDC's primary focus will be on the development of the affordable housing portion of the site, given its mission is to create and preserve affordable housing. It will be critical to the realization of any open space use that the CHDC partner with one or more public or private entities to take leadership and shepherd all aspects of the planning, implementation, and ultimately the oversight and future maintenance of the open space portions of the site. Possible partners for consideration could be the Town of Concord, Concord Natural Resources Commission, Concord Trails Committee, Concord Land Conservation Trust, and/or the Walden Woods Foundation.

APPENDIX

COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

Transcription of Results

Potential Uses for the Resource Area

In groups of 5-6, participants discussed the pros and cons of the sites with their groups. Using a scale of Very Appealing, Somewhat Appealing, Not Appealing, or No Opinion, groups rated the following potential uses for the open space portion of the Concord Junction site.

Trails (walking/hiking; surface materials?; accessible?)		
Group	Rank	Comments
Table A	Very	Stone dust/gravel; Keep as natural as possible with thought to maintenance
Table B	Very	Surface: inner loop-better surface to serve the old, outer loop-more natural
Table C	Somewhat	Soil path, maintenance?, erosion control?
Table D	Very	Connect and extend the network (trails) Make accessible? (stone dust?) Natural surface along river with more developed near BFRT We see multiple trails-loops/connectors
Table E*	N/A	
Table F	Very	ADA accessible primary (stone dust) and compacted earth secondary trails ADA accessible trail should be a loop

* Notes from table facilitator: "Three out of the four participants were only interested in making their objections to the whole idea of building on that site. Two of them were from Winthrop Street and objected strenuously to that street being used as access to the site. One insisted that another road in was the only answer. The other was totally against any such use of the site, citing how it was used as a dump for so long, including for cow's carcasses; but that was only one of his reasons for not using the site at all. I am sure he made his other reasons clear to Henry Schwann, who interviewed him at length at our table. The third objector was concerned about never having any input on the need and usefulness of an assisted living facility on the site. Several people at the table pointed out that other such 40B endeavors ended up catering mostly to non-40B recipients. One person at our table said that if there had to be building on the site, she would prefer that the whole open space be given over to meadow and trees, both of which are so important to the environment in Massachusetts (but she was no longer a Concord resident)."

Trails with associated amenities (informational signage, benches, picnic tables)		
Group	Rank	Comments
Table A	Very	All amenities, with sensitivity to the natural and scenic. Clustered together, not spread across the whole site.
Table B	Somewhat	Entrance sign, use technology? (barcodes)
Table C	N/A	
Table D	Somewhat	Provide amenities by the BFRT away from river-keep it more natural by the Assabet
Table E	N/A	
Table F	Very	Plant signs and tree signs to encourage biodiversity; signs should not be visible from the river but overlooking the river Benches on the ADA accessible trail would be helpful (one or two)

		No picnic tables because it encourages trash
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Car-top boat rest stop with boardwalk		
Group	Rank	Comments
Table A	Not	With sensitivity to the natural and scenic and access to amenities
Table B	Somewhat/ Not	Very expensive?
Table C	Very	With access to amenities
Table D	Not	Will need car/parking access? Not appealing if to launch boats Potential for erosion from activity Appealing if boaters come to dock and visit-picnic/hike
Table E	N/A	
Table F	Somewhat	A naturalized landing with a couple of big rocks to sit on would be nice No boardwalk, no picnic table

Fishing platform		
Group	Rank	Comments
Table A	Not	
Table B	No Opinion	Expensive
Table C	N/A	
Table D	Somewhat	Bird/wildlife "blind", observatory Would love to have a place to observe nature
Table E	N/A	
Table F	Not	It gets trashy, there's plenty of fishing from shore

Natural/wild area (no maintained trails; perhaps removal of invasive plants)		
Group	Rank	Comments
Table A	Somewhat	But not for entire site, needs to sensitively incorporate previous items
Table B	Somewhat	Wild area in combination with trail
Table C	Somewhat	Keep natural, remove invasives, don't take down any trees
Table D	Very	Minimal trails to an observation blind Support invasives removal
Table E	N/A	
Table F	Very	Invasives removal with native planting-with a sustainable perspective Keep cleared areas as meadow to increase biodiversity

Are there other potential uses that should be considered for the resource area?

- Bridge from West Concord to 300 Baker Avenue

Potential Uses for the Northwest Corner Area

In groups of 5-6, participants discussed the pros and cons of the sites with their groups. Using a scale of Very Appealing, Somewhat Appealing, Not Appealing, or No Opinion, groups rated the following potential uses for the open space portion of the Concord Junction site.

Natural meadow		
Group	Rank	Comments
Table A	Somewhat	A portion could be natural meadow
Table B	Very	Cost feasible; biodiversity; small area; planting screening
Table C	Very	
Table D	Very	Proximity to trail is good but may cause problems with rail trail users Rotary and prison areas need more trees to be heat buffer Access by foot on trail
Table E	N/A	
Table F	Very	Minimize lawns Meadows are a much needed habitat

Dog park		
Group	Rank	Comments
Table A	Not	Extensive traffic potential
Table B	Not	Without parking not appealing
Table C	N/A	
Table D	Not	Intense use needs fenced area Too much activity but might relieve high use in town areas
Table E	N/A	
Table F	Not	Bad access, trash would be hard to manage

Community garden		
Group	Rank	Comments
Table A	Somewhat	If for adjacent residents, otherwise will add parking/traffic issues
Table B	Not	No access
Table C	N/A	
Table D	Somewhat	Water access? Provide buffer from rail trail Good access by foot
Table E	N/A	
Table F	Not	Bad access, vegetables will be stolen

Playground/exercise area		
Group	Rank	Comments
Table A	Not	Too intensive use for the location
Table B	Not/ Very	Without parking
Table C	N/A	
Table D	Not	Too isolated Could be an amenity for families visiting Junction Village No parking could limit participation
Table E	N/A	

Table F	Somewhat	A small children's park adjacent to the trail with bike racks would be good, natural playscape
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Pocket park/picnic area		
Group	Rank	Comments
Table A	Very	But would need to include landscaping screening of prison Informational signage included
Table B	Very	For people on BFRT, maybe closer to WC
Table C	N/A	
Table D	Very	Very accessible Acton Arboretum Place for riders to have lunch?
Table E	N/A	
Table F	Not	No picnic area because of trash issue Pocket park is too groomed

Are there other potential uses that should be considered for the Northwest Corner area?

- Creation of a meadow that can serve as performance space?
- Re-foresting of some of the area

Housing Development Component Comment Sheet

Although the focus of the community workshop was to discuss the potential uses for the open space portion(s) of the Village Junction site, the consultants provided a comment sheet for participants who wished to share their thoughts and questions about the housing development component of the site. The following eleven comments were submitted.

Comment #1:

"This is not a park! Most amenities are not necessary. This site is not meant to service the greater W. Concord community."

Comment #2:

"I think an affordable assisted living space is a great use of the property. Low traffic, definite need. I hope to live there someday."

Comment #3:

"It would be great to have alternative access (other than Winthrop St.) to the Concord Junction area. It seems that 83 assisted living units is 'pushing the limits' for the area and the limited access. I am concerned with area visitors parking along Winthrop St."

Comment #4:

"Unless there is another access road other than Winthrop Street it makes it very difficult for me to be interested in other uses of the area. The traffic on Winthrop Street is more than the neighborhood can handle."

Comment #5:

"I have no concerns about usages such as pathways, dog parks, victory gardens or any other passive components. What I do have is a very firm opinion on any additional housing on this site. As a direct abutter to this site (31 Winthrop St), I believe the proposed 83-unit structure is more than enough for this parcel. I would also request the CHDC to explore with BFRT and MCI the viable option to this site from Commonwealth Ave, parallel to the BFRT, into the northwest corner of the parcel."

Comment #6:

"Care needs to be taken to ensure that the development doesn't disturb the environment surroundings. Does the town need this assisted living facility, its shape is weird, almost cookie cutter-like? Amenities around the assisted living, walks exercise stops, meadow in the northwest corner."

Comment #7:

"I'm at the wrong meeting. I have serious concerns about the project itself, regardless of what is done with the open space. When that is the subject of some of the meeting, I will attend and make my concerns known."

Would this project meet environmental standards if it were not affordable housing? If not, why not? What assurance can you offer that the planned number of affordable units will actually be achieved?"

Comment #8:

"I don't want any building or concrete here. Earth's resources are finite, and because of development, pollution, climate change and invasives, they are shrinking. This is a perfect site for a native plant meadow that would serve as an ecosystems area and wildlife habitat."

Comment #9:

“Please require builders to create at least net zero energy buildings; the small investment in planning and careful building pays off financially very quickly in lower operating costs of the building, and can be replicated again and again in future projects, multiplying savings of many thousands of \$\$ while help saving the planet from climate change and enhancing the builder’s reputation at the same time.”

Comment #10:

“Site plan for building site could potentially be re-worked to make better use of the available open space. Parking configuration and stormwater siting could be better integrated/located.

It would be extremely helpful to have several parking spaces or “entry” point BEFORE the assisted living parking/facility (so that any visitors/traffic would NOT cross thru the Grantham controlled/managed portion). Could this be accommodated within the “elbow” between drive and BFRT? There should be at least 2-3 parking spaces, or people will park on Winthrop or within the private commercial lots at the end of Winthrop. It would also be advantageous to have a trash collection and dog poop bag dispensers. This is the only way to effectively manage dog waste.

Development stormwater management should be visually integrated into the plan/treatment of the open space. The footprint of stormwater BMPs will be significant. This could hugely add to the perception of open space if designed appropriately/adequately. Some planted screening buffer in the NW corner would be beneficial as a screen to the view of the prison.”

Comment #11:

“See ‘Boulder Creek Path’ in Boulder, CO as a point of reference and with this in mind:
Pros: love interpretive signs, kids fishing piers, periodic but not continuous access along banks, fish observatory!

Cons: Concrete path, not natural, many structures.

Challenges: How to balance desire for amenities with access against desire to maintain natural ‘wild/scenic waterway’.

Potential answers: Stone dust paths, natural, native plantings, wild, not manicured landscaping, limited number of amenities consistent with town desires.

Key goal: increased connectivity with existing/planned trail network.

You didn’t really allow for discussion about alternative site layouts. I would push the building toward the “NW Corner” and merge picnic/meadow along the edge of the resource area. However, I will take this up when it comes to the planning board.”

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