

## Input to the Junction Park Forum

Wednesday February 16, 2022

February 15, 2022

To Marsha Rasmussen and Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Advisory Committee (BFRTAC),

I appreciate your organizing tomorrow's Forum to obtain public comment on the project principles and scope for a short- and long-term solution to improving the safety of Junction Park (JP) and to share insights from data gathered so far.

I offer the following comments:

### **Project Principles and Criteria.**

- Defining the users of JP and BFRT. Park users must include current users as well as past users who have stopped using the park due to safety concerns. The latter includes seniors at Concord Park, as well as pre-schools, such as Concord Children's Center. In Fall 2020, both groups wrote letters to the Select Board about their concerns about the safety of the park, stating they have/or may curtail usage.

The JP survey had a small representation of people over 80 years old, suggesting that the voice of residents at Concord Park is missing. Concord Park is going through a major renovation, so getting seniors to respond may be difficult. The BFRTAC should find a way to represent the needs of this group.

- Preserving the integrity of Junction Park. Chris Whelan, Concord's Town Manager for 26 years, stated that Junction Park is a gem and the best used park in Concord.

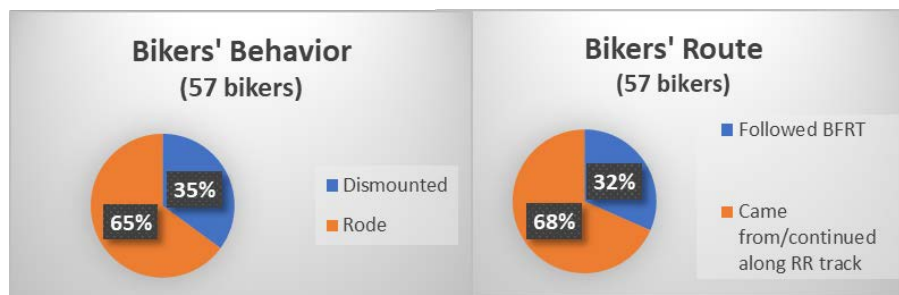
Junction Park provides a vibrant place for families, children, and visitors to socialize and enjoy the beauty of the park's carefully designed and maintained landscaping. A local community group, The West Concord Green Thumbs, was central to the creation of Junction Park and spends countless volunteer hours on the maintenance of the park's elegant landscaping. The park's bioretention area and the test section of sustainable ground covers provide important ecology education.

Optimizing and/or prioritizing the ease of bike user travel through this area omits the key social, cultural and public health attributes that Junction Park provides.

### **Data Findings**

- Evaluating verbatim questions in the BFRTAC Junction Park Survey. Reporting of user attitudes toward safety is, as stated by the Committee, is preliminary. Because the safety question (#7) was a verbatim response, closer scrutiny is needed before any conclusions can be reached. I am sure that the BFRTAC will address this concern.

- Bike Tallies. I assisted in an informal bike count in June 2021. This was not a self-reported survey, rather an observation of bike riders' actual usage. While this tally was not scientific, its findings do reflect what I and other users of JP observe—that is, that the vast majority of bike users (65%) ride through the park and continue directly over the rail road tracks (68%) rather than following the BFRT.



### Solution Alternatives

- Changes to Junction Park should be minimized. While making significant changes to JP to accommodate current and future bike users may seem the simplest approach, such a decision would have detrimental impact on the village of West Concord. As stated above, JP is a core asset for West Concord, visitors, and Concord as a whole.
- Reconfiguration of Club Car Café parking spots. Currently, there are several perpendicular parking spots to the left (looking north toward the Café) of the park. I encourage the BFRTAC to request that Town engineers evaluate reconfiguring these parking spots to angled parking, providing space for the BFRT to pass through this area. Evaluation of the safe turning radius for cars would be a key input. Some parking spots may be lost, along with some shrubs on the border of Junction Park. These losses are regrettable but, to me, seem a reasonable compromise.

The advantage of this solution is that this area is already paved and would intersect cleanly with the BFRT continuation by the Club Car Café. This may optimize bike user compliance, as the path would be simple and intuitive.

### Process Considerations

- I encourage the BFRTAC offer more Forums to engage the public, especially in the design and evaluation of any short- and long-term solutions

Respectfully,

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