

DRAFT --- Higganum Connections --- DRAFT

90 Action Item

“The Town Planner, working with the Town Engineer, should create a map of the existing and possible future trails and walkways, that could contribute to the wellbeing of Higganum Center.”

On January 15th, 2020 the Town Planner met with the Chair of the Conservation Commission and the President of the Land Trust to discuss past work and ideas of how to better connect Higganum Center with the surrounding natural resources. Both brought extensive knowledge and experience to the discussion. Many of the ideas came out in the workshops and are displayed in the final report.

The consensus was that the thoughts and ideas have always been conceptual and the Town needs to focus more on specific connections and then advertising and promoting the opportunities. It was felt very few think of coming to Higganum Center to hike, jog or Mt Bike.

There were six (6) “focus areas” discussed which can be designed and constructed individually with the goal of eventually creating loops around the center. The loops can be hiked individually or as one entire loop from the center around the reservoir into the state park back down to High Street to Killingworth Road back into the center down to the river back up to Swan hill and back down to the center.

Recommended Focus Areas

A. Center to River

- Formally establishing a trail head and blazed trail from Dublin Hill Road through the Cove to the rail line and the River. Once there is more clarity on the future of the town garage and Rossi a more formal trail can be established along Depot Road directly into the center.

B. Cove to Swan Hill

- Establish a blazed trail to connect Swan hill property to the cove and the river along Bible Rock Brook;
- Formalize a trail head somewhere along RT 154 in the vicinity of the Town Green and create a for5mal trail over the HES property to Swan Hill Trails;

C. Center to State Forest

- Connecting the Center to the State forest – As an initial first step a marked trail from the fire house parking lot up to state forest. Sign identifying trail head at 154 and designate parking in corner of upper lot of firehouse. Longer term, discussions with adjacent property owners regarding easements and acquisition to incorporate the Land Trust parcel and connection to High Street and Killingworth Road and reservoir.

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D. Center to and around Higganum Reservoir State Park

This loop has been previously conceptualized as starting in the center to West Street to Hull, down Hull to the State Park.

A second alternate goes from West Street through the Cemetery drive to the Reservoir spill way and then to the fishing dock back to Killingworth Road.

There was also a route which took the trail along the brook behind the buildings on the eastern side of Killingworth Road. While in concept a brookside trail is desirable the trail would be completely on private property and the current conditions are not really conducive to a trail. In addition, wherever possible the town should encourage foot traffic on Killingworth Road to create pedestrian activity in front of the businesses.

The first alternative takes full advantage of the State Park and goes all the way through to Dish Mill Road. From that point the trail crosses Killingworth Road and down to Morris Hubbard where it enters the state park. One could then hike through the state park back on established trails to the trail network discussed in Section "***D. Center to State Forest***".

E. New England Scenic Trail (blue blazed trail) to Swan Hill to Center

The New England Scenic Trail is a a federally designated 215-mile long blue blazed hiking trail from Long Island Sound to the New Hampshire border. With the federal designation, it is felt that trail usage will continue to increase overtime and creating an a easy access to Higganum Center could help existing businesses as it does on other National scenic trails.

- Connect the New England Scenic Trail via a blue/red blazed side trail on Rocky River Realty (Eversource) property to a new trail on the Swan Hill property leading to the Center. This would invite hikers to take the side trail to the center and avoid a road walk from Seven Falls to the Center.

F. Blue / Green Way

There have also been meetings and discussions regarding the proposed blue/green way. The Town Planner and Blue/Green Way advocates have met with staff at the Valley Railroad, River Cog and the City of Middletown regarding an update of the Conway Study. A meeting was scheduled to occur on March 18th with the First Selectman, the Mayor of Middletown, the President of the Chamber, Valley Railroad and the River Cog but was cancelled due to COVID-19.

Next Steps

They next step would be to have a public discussion about these segments and then prioritize the recommendations and determine property access issues, the ease of construction and desirability.

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Some of the \$6,000 currently in the Capital Budget would be used to work with the Town Engineer and a sub-consultant with expertise in trail layout and design. The layout and location of the trail segments would be determined, including mileage and difficulty rating. The consultants and volunteers would walk the trail with a GPS system and then anchor the location into the state topographic grid. Then required trail work would be identified. Depending on the extent of work, the highest priority segment and the work required could be undertaken by volunteers or bid to local landscape companies for construction.

An attractive and distinctive sign post with a name and logo for the trail network to highlight trails and destinations within and beyond the Center should be designed. The signs should be located at the interface between the street and the trail locations. Develop a trailhead parking plan to provide defined locations for visitors to access these trails/destinations.

As trails are developed, events to draw attention to them and paper and web based marketing materials should be prepared. The town should investigate the ownership of HaddamTrails.org and utilize that site.

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