

**Written comments (sticky notes) from the Northern Heights Park Trail
Project Community Meeting
Hosted by RASC
Saturday, March 16, 2024**

1. Has RASC abandoned the development of trails in the open land to the north of northern valley drive? If yes, why? Wetland? Neighbor opposition?

Response: Yes. Results of a Decorah edge study existed for that area and showed much DE present. For the same reasons we abandoned a perimeter trail through the DE in the park, RASC dropped the desire to build in that area North of Northern Valley Drive. Also, most of that land is also Public Works land and not Parks & Rec land.

2. Where are they going to park?

Response: If trail users arrive at the park in a car, it's reasonable to assume they would park in the existing parking lot or on the street, like anyone would if they arrived at the park in a car.

3. No woods just grass in new area? Why use this park then?

Response: I believe this comment is assuming the proposed trail is located in a new grass area and is then asking why bother? If so, there is a correction to be made. The trail is in fact located throughout the SE wooded area. Setting that aside, we hear this person asking why we would want to build this trail in this park. Our response to that is because we believe this trail will serve the community, mountain bikers and non-mountain bikers alike, in a positive way and be a source of good and positive experiences for many people.

4. Where is water runoff going?

Response: Water flows from areas of higher elevation to areas of lower elevation. Constructing the proposed sustainable trail would not change the existing patterns of water flow. Currently, water runoff flows to the bottom of the valley in the park where it creates and helps maintain wetlands.

5. How often will this trail be used? The bike paths on streets aren't used that much.

Response: We cannot predict these numbers. We expect this trail to attract only local users such as neighborhood adults, families, and kids. We also expect users from outside the neighborhood to stop by and use the trail periodically, arriving either by car or by bike. We do not expect this trail to draw crowds or be a destination of particular interest to anyone outside the local community. It is simply too short to attract users from any significant distance. Walking users would complete the lap in about 40-45 minutes and bikers in about 15 minutes.

6. Why not consider city park area West of Silver Lake Pool?

Response: Thank you for this suggestion.

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/BtZZv7i92Q9Dzpsc7>

7. What happens to the playground area?

Response: RASC is not asking for or expecting any changes to the playground area. The playground area will not be impacted by the construction of a sustainable trail or by the use of that trail.

8. Great Idea, go for it. 100% support this plan.

Response: Thank you for your support.

9. Please Please make this trail happen!

Response: Thank you for your support. We believe this trail will be an asset to the community, but that will only be true if the community truly does value it.

10. When was plan finalized and by whom?

The current version is a solid industry standards version that meets or exceeds trail guidelines in terms of density, curvature and slope. The plan is not finalized. This is still a concept plan. The proposed trail plan is still open for changes in response to community input.

11. We live a couple blocks from the park. We do not want mountain bikes in this wildlife-filled, natural park. Keep this park undeveloped. Find another park!

Response: We hear you. Thank you for your input.

12. Can another community meeting be set?

Response: We are digesting our experiences from this community meeting and discussing the possibility of holding more community engagement sessions. We will share more information once we have a better understanding of the path forward.

13. How safe can a dual use trail [be]?

Response: The Parks department reports no reported trail conflicts from Eastwood and Gamehaven in the past several years, and no injuries either. RASC installed Gamehaven trail signage with recommended trail usage direction in 2023 to help further minimize possible conflict situations. No known hiker/biker collisions have occurred on Minnesota singletrack trails. Studies show that the [perception of conflicts](#) and rumors of supposed collisions can be [quite persistent](#) in certain groups, while actual incidents are [quite low or nonexistent](#). As the study *Local Community Perceptions About Mountain Bike Riding in Peri-urban National Parks* (SD Rossi, 2014) points out, "locals who do not use the parks may experience social value conflicts, where problems are experienced without direct contact among those engaging in different recreational activities". In other words, those who never shared trails with another group often feel that sharing with that group was hard or impossible.

14. After this presentation I'm very excited! Thanks for all your hard work (and I live right by the proposed trail)!

Response: Thank you very much for your support.

15. What do you plan to do with the deer in the park? Last year 5 deer were shot by an archer to help control population. Without this the deer would eat all our flowers & garden.

Response: We do not expect the sustainable trail to impact the deer in any way. The proposed trail would not interfere with City-regulated archery events/seasons in the park. Those events/seasons would continue as usual with trail closures for safety as deemed necessary by the Parks department.

16. The parking lot is used by the ice rink teams, baseball teams & lacrosse teams. It can be very busy.

Response: Thank you for this information.

17. Why not expand an existing bike path in Rochester? A 1.5 mi standalone seems pointless. Why bother?

Response: We are proposing this trail project because we believe this trail will serve the community, mountain bikers and non-mountain bikers alike, in a positive way and be a source of good and positive experiences for many people. If the question refers to expanding existing trails at Eastwood and Gamehaven, Eastwood is already at maximum density and Gamehaven does not have 1.5 miles of expansion available.

18. Do you know the parking lot by the ice rink floods & is a mess every time it rains.

Response: Thank you for this information.

19. Are the recommended numbers of miles of trails for communities according to the population? If so, are there recommendations for the proximity of such trails to residential areas to encourage healthy living for the residential area?

Response: At this time, there are no known ratios between population and trails recommended. Making this answer a bit harder is the type of trails in question: paved trails, wider natural surface trails, or singletrack sustainable trails. Current conditions in Minnesota don't give a concrete answer, either. For instance, when discussing singletrack sustainable trails, Duluth (metroplex pop. 291,323) has 103 miles of trails (2,282 persons:1 mile) , while Minneapolis/St. Paul (metroplex pop. 3,690,261) has 140 miles of such trail (26,359 persons:1 mile). However, in the past decade [a new way of thinking about trails](#) has emerged: 'hike-to-your-hike' or 'ride-to-your-ride'. By creating a large number of small (1-3 mile) trails in neighborhoods, they [are more likely](#) to be used [by the neighbors](#) on a [regular basis](#), as studies show. This use correlates with [health benefits](#) and increased property values.

20. Are e-bikes considered the same as pedal powered bikes? Is there any valid reason to ban or to support use of such bikes on these trails?

Response: Park staff can verify but RASC believes there are currently no special restrictions regarding the use of ebikes in parks. Regarding a reason to support their use, they help people who are otherwise unable to enjoy the activity to do so. It is analogous to how ability scooters help people get out and navigate their environment. RASC is willing work with the Parks department to develop a more detailed park trail usage policy and gather public input along the way.

21. Can we put some benches near overlooks to invite appreciation of the natural area?

Response: We would love for benches to be available for people to rest and/or reflect at a couple of spots. This seems like a subject that should be driven by user input as having 2-3 benches does add another layer of observable 'development' to the current users. We do see benches as a small positive amenity, especially for the oldest and youngest user groups. We have had requests for more benches at Gamehaven also.

22. Where should we send future questions we want answered?

Response: You can email us at info@rasc-mn.org

23. Will RASC ask any of its members on the Park Board to recuse themselves from the final decision?

Response: Park Board members follow city rules directing when they need to recuse themselves from decisions and we leave it to them to follow those rules.

24. What is RASC's plan to mark all trails in NHP as "Yield to Pedestrian" [?]

Response: We intend to put up a kiosk at the entrance with a map and usage rules.

25. Entrances near LDS?

Response: We currently have no plans for alternate entrances. The only planned entrance for this trail is at the Southwest corner of the park, across the street from the gravel parking lot.

26. Where does the funding come from for your projects?

Response: RASC is a local non-profit organization. Our funding comes from membership dues, donations, and grants.

27. You have no plans for a bathroom. Where will these users go to the bathroom? In the woods?

Response: We expect the trail users to use the park in the same manner as anyone using any of the other park features or amenities, like those who use the ice rink or the existing walking trail or the playground area. We anticipate the majority of trail users to live in homes near the park.

28. What happens to deer?

Response: We do not expect the sustainable trail to impact the deer in any way. Deer in Eastwood and Gamehaven utilize the trail for ease of navigation regularly.

29. Call me, I have more questions.

Response: Thank you for providing your contact information. We would love to receive your questions via email so we can do any necessary research and provide a thoughtful response.