

THOMPSON ISLAND TRAIL PROJECT – RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS

On March 9, 2011, a public Open House was hosted by the Division of Parks and Recreation to discuss the proposed Thompson Island Trail Project. Comment forms distributed to members of the public were received at the Open House and for a period of approximately two weeks thereafter. In addition to the comment forms, other correspondence was received from the public. While the open house attendees, comments forms, and correspondence expressed a wide range of concerns, certain significant questions were asked or implied, in many cases, repeatedly. These questions are addressed as follows.

Question 1: Why is this project being proposed? Why not leave the trail as it is?

Answer: The property was originally purchased by the State with funding that requires it to remain open to the public for outdoor recreational use. In order to fulfill that responsibility, the proposed trail improvements are necessary to repair current deficiencies, address safety issues, and make the trail ADA-compliant, so that the trail is in condition suitable for public use in various weather, tides, and seasons.

Question 2: What is the source of funding for the project?

Answer: Funding is provided by the Federal Recreational Trails Program and can only be used for trail projects.

Question 3: How many parking spaces are proposed?

Answer: Plans include a total of three (3) parking spaces, including one ADA space, for use by park staff and by special arrangement. The spaces are designed to accommodate cars and a 14-passenger van. No public parking is proposed.

Question 4: What type of surface will the parking lot have?

Answer: The parking lot will be stone with a compacted stone dust surface.

Question 5: Where will the visitors park? Public parking can't be provided by the Bay Road neighborhood on its narrow streets.

Answer: A significant increase in need for public parking is not anticipated, since the project is not being designed or promoted as a drive-in destination, but rather as a pedestrian/ bicycle destination. There will be no public parking provided as part of this project. To accommodate those who wish to bicycle to the trailhead, a bicycle rack will be installed near the small staff parking lot allowing visitors to ride their bikes to the trailhead and secure them while they take advantage of this outdoor recreational opportunity. It is anticipated that a large percentage of visitors will be local residents, not regional or statewide.

Question 6: Where is the proposed parking lot located?

Answer: The proposed 3-car parking lot is located adjacent to the trail, approximately 200 feet away from the end of Bay Road and the nearest property on Sandra Street.

Question 7: Why do the stakes on site seem to indicate a parking lot much larger than needed for 3 cars?

Answer: The survey stakes were placed to outline a large area that was evaluated for impacts to cultural and natural resources within which a small parking lot could be located. Ultimately a 42' x 45' parking lot for 3 cars was located on a small area within that large staked area. The stakes, which no longer serve any purpose, have been removed.

Question 8: How much noise will vehicles make in the parking lot? How much noise will be generated by people getting into and out of their vehicles? Will a sound barrier be needed to buffer the noise from the adjacent properties?

Answer: Because the 3-car parking lot is only for use by park staff and by special arrangement and will be used relatively infrequently, no appreciable increase in vehicular noise or noise by people getting into or out of their cars is anticipated. The distance between the parking lot and the nearest properties and the natural screening provided by the woods should buffer what little noise there might be. For these reasons, a sound barrier will not be necessary.

Question 9: Will increased traffic be generated by the proposed improvements? Concerns include safety, noise, pollution, emergency access, and general impact to the local community.

Answer: Since there will be no change in the basic management practices and activities allowed in the Nature Preserve, it is anticipated that the trail will be used in the future very much like it is today. New visitors are likely to be largely neighbors, bicyclers, and those participating in State Park programs who will generate minimal vehicular traffic. Considering this and that no public parking is proposed, it appears that once the project is completed, any traffic increase will be minimal, not exceeding that usually caused by normal summer traffic at the beach and seasonal crowding.

Question 10: What volume of construction truck traffic is anticipated on Bay Road? Concerns include safety, noise, pollution, emergency access, and damage to Bay Road.

Answer: Because the project is relatively small, the anticipated volume of construction truck traffic is relatively small. The project will require stone for only $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of trail and a 3-car parking lot, which amounts to approximately 50 truckloads of stone delivered to the site over a four month period. Deliveries of materials for the boardwalk and observation deck will be minimal.

Question 11: What provisions will be made to repair any damage to Bay Road caused by the construction vehicles?

Answer: If any damage to Bay Road is caused by construction vehicles in the construction of the proposed project, the contractor for the project will be responsible for repair of the road.

Question 12: When will the construction occur?

Answer: Construction is planned to start in the fall to minimize impact to the community by avoiding the busy summer season. Construction should be completed in approximately four months, depending on weather.

Question 13: What type of surface will the trail have in order to conform to ADA requirements?

Answer: The trail will be constructed of stone topped with compacted stone dust. This surface has been determined to be accessible by the Delaware Architectural Accessibility Board, the governing authority for ADA matters in the State of Delaware.

Question 14: How large is the Vista Observation Deck? How much clearing will have to be done?

Answer: The observation deck is approximately 20' x 26' and has upper and lower level decks. The upper level will allow a person in a wheelchair to enjoy the scenic view without sight obstruction of a safety rail, as their line of sight will be elevated above the top of rail. No mature or significant trees will be cleared.

Question 15: Will the parking area have public restrooms?

Answer: No restrooms are proposed in this project.

Question 16: Have access points other than Bay Road been considered?

Answer: Access from the road along the canal near the sewer treatment plant was considered but rejected because: This access would require property not owned by the State; a costly boardwalk would have to be constructed through a marsh area; and an entrance near a sewer treatment plant was considered less than desirable for a state park. Other access points suggested by the public are through lands not owned by the State.

Question 17: Why not extend improvements to the entire trail all the way to the bay beach, including the loop trail at the south end of Thompson Island?

Answer: In order to extend improvements to the bay beach, the trail segment along the Lewes and Rehoboth Canal, severely eroded due to its proximity to the canal, would require costly

extensive boardwalks or bank stabilization not funded under the current project. The southern segment of the loop trail along the beach has been closed due to erosion of the beach.

Question 18: Will the proposed project compromise the protection of the cultural resources on Thompson Island by improving access to the cultural resources?

Answer: The cultural resources will continue to have the same protections as currently exist. The proposed project improvements do not extend to the location of the cultural resources on Thompson Island. The vista observation deck, located prior to the cultural resources, is intended to create a destination at the end of the improved trail beyond which users will not be encouraged to go.

Question 19: What impact will the proposed project have on the Nature Preserve's plants, animals, and wetlands?

Answer: The proposed project will be constructed in accordance with the status afforded to Thompson Island by its designation as a nature preserve. Trail improvements will follow the existing trail alignment to minimize any impacts. The boardwalk, by changing this section of trail from at-grade where wetlands are trampled, to elevated boardwalk, reduces the overall impact to wetlands. In addition, the boardwalk's grated deck allows light penetration to support growth of wetlands plants beneath the deck. The proposed 3-car parking lot was located so as to have no impact on wetlands or associated wildlife. No mature or significant trees will be removed for the project.

Question 20: How will the trail be promoted? Will it be signed and advertised to result in increased usage and traffic?

Answer: There will be no location or directional signs placed off the Nature Preserve property as part of this project. Information about all Delaware State Park amenities is available on www.destateparks.com The Division will take no additional steps to market this trail to a statewide or regional user base.

Question 21: Will additional activities be allowed on the trail, to include biking or dog walking?

Answer: There will be no change in the basic management practices and activities allowed in the Nature Preserve. Currently the trail is for pedestrian use only and will continue to be so after the project is completed. No bikes or dogs are allowed on the trail.

Question 22: What about residents who still don't know about the project? Will there be an additional open house to address concerns of residents who live out of town?

Answer: There are no plans for an additional open house. The Open House held in March, advertised by public notice in the Cape Gazette and Delaware State News, as well as various newspaper articles have provided opportunities for the public to be informed about the project.

Additionally the information presented at the Open House can be found online at www.destateparks.com/thompson.

Question 23: How will the Nature Preserve be patrolled and by whom?

Answer: Park rangers will continue to patrol the Nature Preserve as is current practice. Routine patrols will be conducted at least once a week. Additionally, park rangers will respond to reported incidents. Incidents may be reported to the Enforcement Dispatcher at 1-800-523-3336. To report non-emergency situations such as an obstruction on the trail, the Park Office may be contacted at 302-227-2800. Interested residents may contact the Division about the formation of a public trail watch group.

Question 24: What will be done if increased traffic in the neighborhood creates instances of crime and privacy concerns (where it is now nonexistent)?

Answer: As noted, crime and privacy concerns have not been a problem and it is not anticipated to change. The law enforcement agencies currently having jurisdiction will continue to provide law enforcement. Park rangers, who are certified law enforcement officers, will patrol the nature preserve at least once a week. Additionally, park rangers will respond to incidents reported to the Enforcement Dispatcher at 1-800-523-3336.

Question 25: What changes were made to the plans as a result of public comments?

Answer:

Construction is to begin this fall, instead of summer, to avoid the busiest season.

A bicycle rack was added to the project. It will be installed near the small staff parking lot allowing visitors to ride their bikes up to the trailhead and then secure them while they continue on foot to take advantage of this outdoor recreational opportunity.

Spring Lake access was reduced from four locations shown on the plan to two locations at the request of Spring Lake residents.

Thank you to all who participated in this process!