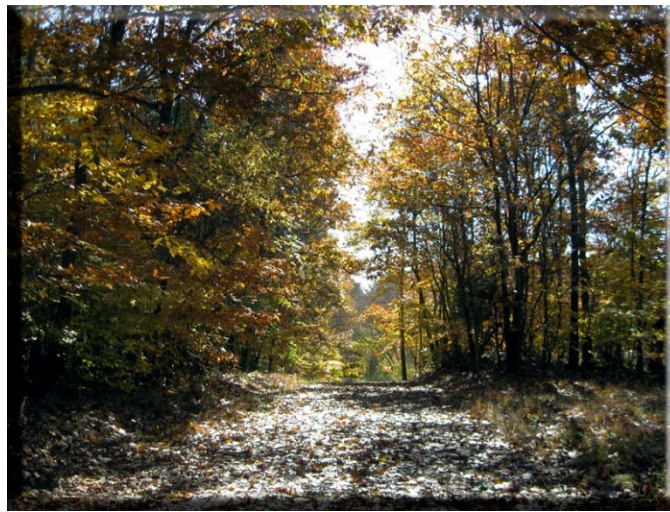


Integrated Trails Ecosystem Plan for Chester



Chester Borough



Chester Township

***Prepared by
Conservation Resources
May 2012***

The Chester Integrated Trails Plan was made possible by the financial support of the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC), the Chester Historical Society, the Chester Borough Open Space Trust Fund, the Chester Township Open Space Trust Fund, and the Raritan Highlands Commission/North Jersey RC&D.

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A Note about the maps in this report: The maps in this report were created by Conservation Resources with data from Morris County GIS, NJ Department of Environmental Protection, Bing Maps, Chester Township, Conservation Resources, and ESRI. Maps that show the entire study area (Chester Township and Chester Borough) are at a scale of 1:62,000. The other maps are scaled depending on what is being depicted.

Existing trails are shown as a solid colored line. Potential trails are shown as dotted lines. For example, in the legend on the right the “Mt. Olive Patriots’ Path Connector” and the “Chester Canoe Trails” are potential trails. “Existing Municipal Trail Networks”, “Patriots’ Path Blue Spur” are existing trails. Preserved Farmland and Preserved Open space are also shown on most of the maps. Preserved Open Space generally connotes parks and other areas where public access is allowed, while Public Access on Preserved Farmland is generally prohibited.



Figure 1 Example of a Map Legend in this report.

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I. Introduction

Chester Township and Borough are two suburban towns located in Morris County, New Jersey. Residents enjoy a high quality of life with great schools, shopping opportunities, and a strong community. Contributing greatly to this quality of life are the expansive areas of public parks, open space and farmland that have been preserved throughout the area. In fact, an astonishing 19.2 square miles or 62% of the land area of both the towns is preserved as farmland or open space. In addition to maintaining a scenic, rustic atmosphere, this amount of preserved open space means that Chester will soon reach complete build-out --that is, virtually all available land will have been either developed or preserved. As a result, there will be very little new, large scale development that will change the character of the landscape.

The Chester Borough and Chester Township Environmental Commissions decided to take a comprehensive look at this “Green Infrastructure” of preserved open space and farmland as well as other outstanding community attributes. Their vision is to link these attributes together through trails.

Leading this vision is a Project Team comprised of residents of both communities including Ed Ng, Chairman, Marla Jackson, Doug Carmel, Maxine Finney, Julie Gause, Bill Foelsch, and Nathan Charron from North Jersey RC&D. Michael Catania and Jon Wagar from Conservation Resources serve as consultants and team members. In addition, Morris County GIS provided technical support and much of the data used in the maps of this report. This report was produced by Conservation Resources with substantial input and guidance from the Project Team.

Like traditional infrastructure, “Green Infrastructure” needs management and stewardship if it is to continue to maximize its benefit to the community. This is true of the extensive trail network in Chester which currently spans a little more than 50 miles. Approximately 32 miles of the trails in Chester were created and are managed by the Morris County Park Commission, which is the largest landowner in Chester. The majority of the remaining trails – approximately 15 miles – are managed by Chester Township with approximately 3.4 miles of formal trails managed by the NJ State Park Service at

Hacklebarney State park. The New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife owns and manages the Black River Wildlife Management Area which is one of the largest properties in town, however the one marked rail-trail through the property, the West Morris Greenway, is managed by the Morris County Park Commission.

Well managed, readily accessible trails can be amenities that drive economic activity. Trails leading to points of interest in and around

Chester Borough could attract additional tourists to the area, where small shops, restaurants, and other business located in historic buildings already serve visitors.

The Morris County Park Trail System in Chester

Morris County Parks in Chester include the Willowood Arboretum, Bamboo Brook, Black River County Park, and the Kay Environmental Center. The County Park Commission also owns and operates the historic Cooper Grist Mill. Tying these parks together is Patriots’ Path, also managed by the County Park System.

Patriots’ Path is a renowned multi-branched trail network that extends throughout Morris County and forms the backbone of Chester’s trails. In addition to Patriots’ Path, the County is also creating the West Morris Greenway, which

TOTALS				
Preserved Farmland	1282.0	acres	2.0	sq miles
Preserved Open Space and Parks	11030.0	acres	17.2	sq miles
TOTAL LAND IN PRESERVED STATUS	12312.0	acres	19.2	sq miles
Total area of Chester Township	18752.0	acres	29.3	sq miles
Total Area of Chester Borough	960.0	acres	1.5	sq miles
TOTAL AREA OF BOTH TOWNS	19712.0	acres	30.8	sq miles
% OF LAND AREA OF TOWNS IN PRESERVED STATUS	62%			
Total Trails in Chester Managed by Morris County	170634.9	feet	32.3	miles
Total Trails in Chester Managed by State Park Service	17741.7	feet	3.4	miles
Total Trails Managed by Chester	79377.5	feet	15.0	miles
Total existing trails	267754.1	feet	50.7	miles

Figure 2 Preserved Open Space and Trails in Chester Township and Chester Borough.

will eventually connect Chester to Succasunna in Roxbury Township. In addition, Morris County owns Mt. Paul County Park which has many unmarked trails, but is not easily accessible to the public.

The Chester Trail System

Chester Township and Chester Borough have wonderful, well managed park systems that include approximately 15 miles of trails. Chester Parks include Evans Family Preserve, Tiger Brook Park & MacGregor Preserve, Highlands Ridge Preserve, Black River Fields, Chubb Park (both Chester Township and Borough), Grove Street Park, Tanners Brook Preserve, and Borough Park and Municipal Field, off Main Street. The Township-owned Parker Road Preserve also has several unmarked trails. The trails in Chester Township Parks tend to be well maintained and well-

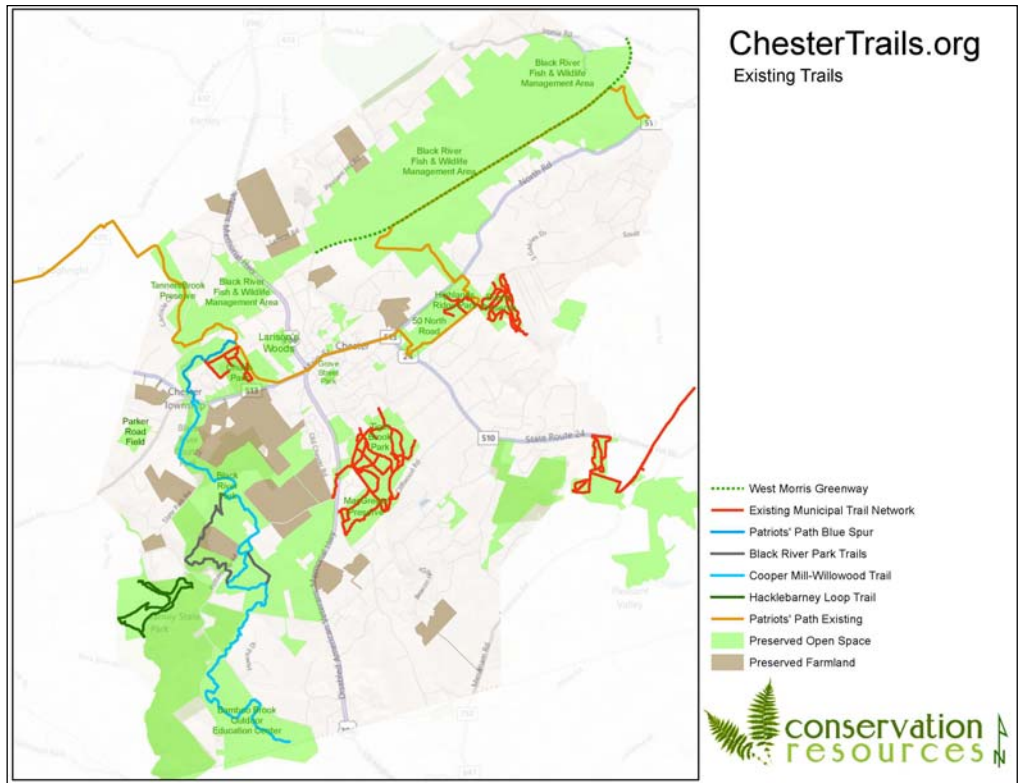


Figure 3 Existing Trails in Chester.

marked. There are also trail maps available through the township website, and on HikeChester.org.

Report Recommendations

After careful analysis of the existing trails and substantial public input, there are five distinct categories of projects which this plan is recommending to improve Chester’s Trails;

- 1) **Creating Regional Trail Connections to better link Chester trails to other existing and emerging trail networks in Morris and Somerset Counties and beyond;**
- 2) **Creating local trail connections to ensure access to the thousands of acres of parks and open space in Chester;**
- 3) **Creating safe areas for walking and biking within existing parks and connecting neighborhoods to trails by safe pedestrian and bike friendly lanes along local, county, and state roads;**
- 4) **Improving the conditions of existing trails; and**
- 5) **Promoting Chester Trails through a series of theme trails, new informational brochures, new kiosks located in strategic locations, monthly trail events, and a network of volunteer trail stewards.**

This plan recommends creation of additional off-road trails, most of which would connect parks and points of interest that are not currently part of the trail network. The plan also recommends improvements to several existing trails to encourage more use. At the same time, we recommend reducing the density of trails at several Chester Township Parks. The reduction in the number of trails at these parks will hopefully free up resources to help maintain the new trails.

We also recommend creation of at least two safe, pedestrian road crossings. The priority pedestrian crossing would be created at North Road where Patriots’ Path crosses from Black River Fields to Highlands Ridge Park. This crossing would

not only serve users of Patriots' Path, but would create a safer situation for children and parents using Black River Fields and the new athletic fields at Highlands Ridge Park.

It is clear from the public input we received that people in Chester desire roads that are more pedestrian and bike friendly. Although a longer-term, somewhat capital-intensive project, creating safe pedestrian and bike lanes along main roads is perhaps the biggest thing that could be done to improve the quality of life of residents in the area. This plan provides suggestions and prioritizes where pedestrian and bike lanes could be created.

The plan also outlines simple, low-cost steps that can be taken to promote the existing and proposed off-road trail network. These include installation of directional signage, new informational kiosks at key locations, and technological tools like online maps and use of QR codes so that hikers can learn more about particular points of interest. Monthly guided hikes are also a way to engage the community in trails. Another key component will be developing a corps of Volunteer Trail Stewards. Through the Chester Trails planning process, we have identified over 130 people in town that have interest in trails

and could be approached about becoming Volunteer Trail Stewards.

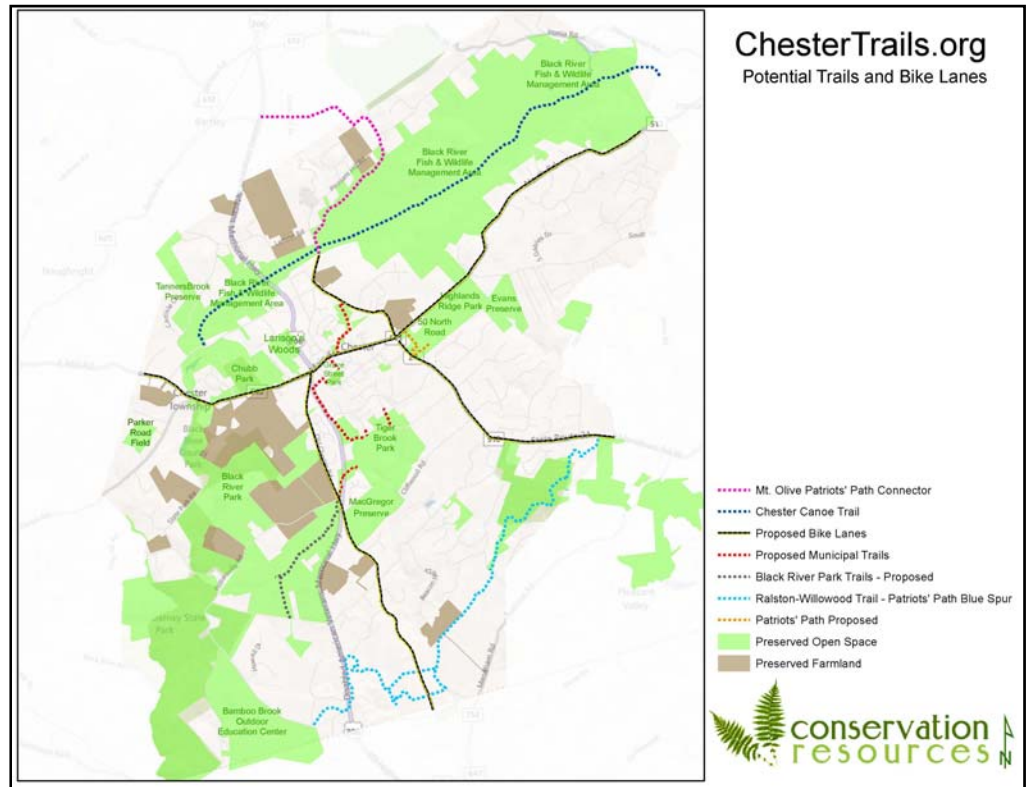


Figure 4 Potential Trails and Bike Lanes in Chester.

Finally, as part of our effort to ensure that as much of this the Chester Trails Plan gets implemented as quickly and as smoothly possible, Conservation Resources and the Project Team have already begun to implement some of the recommendations – a purposeful “jump start” to move from planning to doing.

For example, as part of Chester Trails, we created HikeChester.org, a simple-to-use website where current trail maps can be downloaded. In addition, we created themed trails (a history trail, a geology trail, and a farming heritage trail), sample QR codes and signs, and a database of Points of Interest that could easily and inexpensively be developed to promote an on-the-ground trail network.

II. What the Public Wants

The foundation of the Chester Trails Plan is public input. Through a collaborative, participatory public meeting and a survey, we were able to understand how the community feels about existing trails and what type of improvements they envision.

More than 40 people attended the first public meeting, and over 130 people responded to the online survey. We distributed paper copies of the survey at the Chester Library and had a few responses. About 72% of the people that responded to the survey were from Chester Township, some 17% were from the Borough, and the remainder of respondents were nearby residents interested in Chester trails.

Generally, people who responded to the survey were familiar with the trail network in Chester. About 54% indicated that they used trails and parks in Chester frequently, and the remaining respondents stated that they used the trails and parks occasionally. The favorite parks in town were #1, Hacklebarney State Park, #2 Cooper Mill/Black River County Park, #3 Chubb Park, #4 Grove Street Park, #5 Tiger Brook Park, #6 Highlands Ridge Park, #7 Black River Wildlife Management Area, and #8 Willowood Arboretum/Bamboo Brook Outdoor Education Center. Relatively fewer people listed MacGregor Preserve, Evans Family Preserve, Highlands Ridge Park, Mount Paul Memorial County Park, 50 North Road, or Tanners Brook Preserve as favorites, although these parks are well marked with trails and every bit as scenic as Hacklebarney State Park or Black River County Park.

The survey asked respondents to indicate their top three uses of parks and open space. The number one use of parks and open space was for hiking and walking, followed by enjoying scenery, and dog walking. When asked about the conditions of trails, only 50% of respondents indicated that they thought the trail conditions were excellent while 43% indicated that the trails need some maintenance. It should be noted, however, that the survey was conducted in the fall and early winter of 2011 and the area had just seen an unusual fall snowstorm that produced many fallen tree limbs that blocked trails. Most people also felt that the availability of trail maps and information was “good” or “okay” as opposed to excellent, good, not good and poor – essentially a grade of a “C”. The same “grade of C” pattern can be seen when respondents were asked about trail markers and safety of trails.

Not surprisingly, the reason people gave for not walking and biking in Chester was “problematic road or trail conditions” followed by “lack of lighting”. An overwhelming 88% of respondents would like to see more bike lanes along main roads in Chester.

When asked about the Chester Trails plan, respondents also clearly wanted access to regional trails beyond Chester. The majority of suggested uses were passive use of trails. Here is the entire list:

- 68% access to regional trails beyond Chester
- 59% water’s edge
- 57% passive trails and greenery
- 51% wildflower areas
- 48% access to waterways
- 44% butterfly gardens
- 43% native species habitat
- 42% areas for dogs to run
- 37% using Internet and smart phones to access trail and open space information
- 29% sports and recreation fields
- 29% amphitheater for performances
- 24% public art / sculptures
- 22% sport courts

10% equestrian use

The survey also included sections where respondents could provide written comments. The vast majority of comments fell into four categories: safety, maintenance, maps, and trail connections. For a summary of the Survey Results, see the Appendix.

Distilling the results of the survey, the Project Team identified five issues that seemed most important to the community: Regional Trail Connections, Local Trail Connections, Connecting Neighborhoods to Trails, Trail Improvements, and Creation of Bicycle and Pedestrian Lanes along Roadways. This report provides detailed recommendations to address each of these issues.

III. Recommendations for top 5 issues identified by the Project Team

A. Regional Trail Connections

Patriots' Path

The backbone of the trail system in Chester is Morris County Park Commission's Patriots' Path. Patriots' Path is an extensive trail network that spans Morris County and consists of a main stem (blazed with brown signs), first order spurs (blazed with blue signs), and second order spurs (blazed in red). Patriots' Path intersects numerous State, County, and local trail systems throughout the area. It also connects to the Highlands Trail, which spans the entire Highlands Region, and the developing Liberty to Watergap Trail, which will eventually connect Liberty State Park in Jersey City with the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. These two regional trails intersect with the Appalachian Trail. This means that it is possible to start walking from trails in Chester, get to the Appalachian Trail and continue walking all the way to Maine or Georgia!

The Morris County Park Commission is in the process of re-routing the main stem of Patriots' Path in Chester from a crossing at Route 206 near the Black River Bridge to Main Street, 50 North Road, and Highlands Ridge Park. This unique downtown route will provide a wonderful opportunity for visitors to Chester to learn about and use Patriots' Path. It will also provide hikers with an opportunity to patronize the diverse local businesses in downtown Chester.

West Morris Greenway

The West Morris Greenway is another emerging regional trail that follows an abandoned railroad bed from Pleasant

Hill Road in Chester, through Randolph, up to Succasunna in Roxbury. The Morris

County Park Commission is improving the gravel surface of the trail to ensure that it is accessible for multiple uses. With improvements and better pedestrian and biking connection to downtown Chester, The West Morris Greenway could become a well-used popular trail like the Columbia Trail in Washington Township, or the D&R Canal Trail that spans central New Jersey and part of the Delaware River.

1. Linking Chester Borough to Patriots' Path to the East

Not only does Chester Borough have many points of interest, it is located in the geographic center of the project area. Many of the existing gaps in the trail network can be filled if trails are created and enhanced through the Borough. Furthermore, such links would allow trail users to have better access to local businesses, historic sites, and other attractions in the Borough. These businesses would also certainly benefit from additional visitation by trail users.

Linking trails through the Borough should be a priority. There are three major trail linkages that need to be established. Patriots' Path East/West Morris Greenway, Chubb Park/Chester Library/ Patriots' Path West, and Tiger Brook

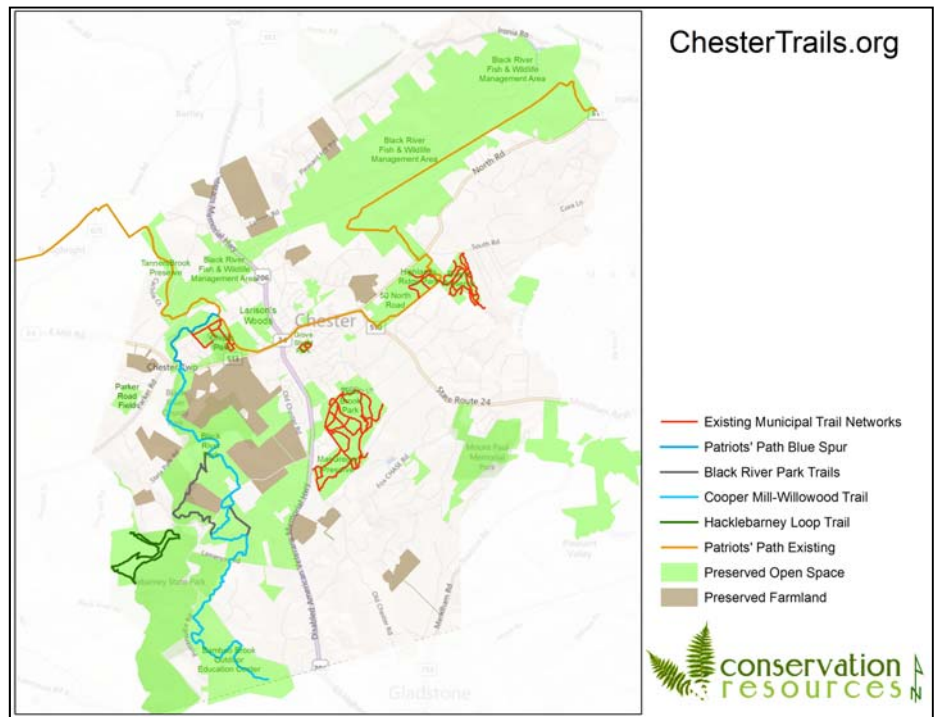


Figure 5 Regional Trail Connections in Chester.

Preserve/MacGregor Preserve. In addition, Patriots' Path needs to be well marked and publicized from 50 North Road to Main Street through the Borough to the turn-off before the Chester Library.

The most practical and scenic way to connect Patriots' Path to Chester Borough is through the 50 North Road Property, recently purchased by Chester Borough. This new portion of Patriots' Path would traverse the top of what is perhaps the best view in the region, Seward's Hill. In fact, on clear days it is possible to see the Empire State Building from the top of Seward's Hill!

Heading to the Northeast from 50 North Road, Patriots' Path is completed and blazed. It follows the boundary of 50 North Road and leads to the Township's Highlands Ridge Park and the Evans Family Preserve. Heading to the Southwest and then



Figure 6 Proposed Route of Patriots' Path through 50 North Road Property.

the Northwest, Patriots' path has not yet been blazed. Seward's Hill can and should become a major Point of Interest for Patriots' Path and Chester Trail users. The expansive vista on Seward's Hill will likely provide a good area for birding (especially hawk-watching) during the fall and spring bird migrations. Care will have to be taken locating the trail through these fields to avoid the active groundwater remediation activities as well as ecologically sensitive areas. After the trail climbs Seward's Hill, it should parallel Route 510 (Route 24) to the North until the sidewalk begins.

Once Patriots' Path intersects Main Street, it should continue on the sidewalk to the West.



Panoramic View from Seward's Hill, photo by Ed Ng

The Morris County Park Commission manages Patriots' Path and has indicated a willingness to create and blaze Patriots' Path through this area. Free-standing Patriots' Path trail signs would be necessary through the fields, and it will be important to locate the trail as to not interfere with the existing field management and groundwater remediation activities. Since this trail would be traversing what is currently a large grassy field, management of this trail would require periodic mowing during the growing season. This should be incorporated into general management of the 50

North Road property. Additional amenities should be considered on Seward’s Hill, including benches, an observation deck, and public binoculars (see the 50 North Road management plan for more information).

2. Linking Chubb Park and Chester Library to Patriots’ Path West

The 193-acre Chubb Park is shared by both Chester Township and Chester Borough. The property contains undeveloped forested areas as well as active recreational facilities including playing fields, a skating pond, and an outdoor walking/running track. It is one of the most popular parks in town and it is the site of many community events such as Oktoberfest, the Fireman’s Carnival, and the Morris County 4H Fair. The Chester Library is located adjacent to Chubb Park, so improving the trail from Chester Borough to Chubb Park would also provide better walking access to the Chester Library.

Walking to Chubb Park from Chester Borough is possible now, but involves crossing Route 206. Safety improvements should be made to encourage more use. If Patriots’ Path is routed on both sides of Main Street, which is what we are suggesting in Section A1, the Route 206 crossing should be on the north side of Main Street where there is an existing crosswalk and signals.

Heading west across Route 206, the sidewalk is in need of some repairs. This sidewalk, which is approximately 1,600 feet long, should be significantly widened and made more attractive for pedestrians. The paved area should be expanded to accommodate bikes, strollers, and walkers. Since both the Library and Chubb Park are such popular attractions, a substantial and meaningful improvement to the sidewalk connecting to downtown Chester would encourage more use and should be a priority.

Finally, we are recommending a new loop trail be created to connect



Figure 7 Proposed Patriots' Path Route to Chester Library, Larison Woods Trail.

Patriots’ Path to Larison Woods. This trail would enable users to explore one of the Borough’s newer parks. The Larison Woods Trail should be designed to avoid environmentally sensitive wildlife habitat located on the property.

3. Linking Tiger Brook Park & MacGregor Preserve to Main Street

Tiger Brook Park and MacGregor Preserve are contiguous, township-owned Parks located off Route 206 and Cooper Lane. Together, these parks encompass approximately 445 acres and contain almost 8 miles of scenic trails. Currently, the parks are accessible via two parking areas, one on Cooper Lane and the other off Old Chester Road. There is also a trail entrance at the end of Cliffwood Road. Given their size, location, and beauty, it is surprising more people didn’t rank these parks as favorites in the Trails Survey. Tiger Brook Park and MacGregor Preserve could easily be connected to Downtown Chester. Chester Township owns a conservation easement that includes public trail access from the park boundary to where the sidewalk starts on Route 206. The trail could then follow this new sidewalk along Route 206 and

continue north to Maple Lane to Seminary Avenue then to Grove Street Park. Another suggestion was made to connect these Parks to Fox Chase Road, thereby providing better access for residents that live on that side of town.

There are two other trail connections to Tiger Brook that should be highlighted: the existing paved trail from Skinner Trail and another un-surfaced trail from Bell Court. These two trails are currently used informally, but they should be marked and formally brought into the Tiger Brook and MacGregor Preserve trail system. These trails would also provide better access for Chester residents who live in the Colby Farm development.

Creation of trail connections to Tiger Brook Park and MacGregor Preserve could be done at low cost with trail volunteers (see trail promotion section of this report). Standard blazing/signs would need to be purchased as well as an additional kiosk where Colby Farm Road meets Route 206.

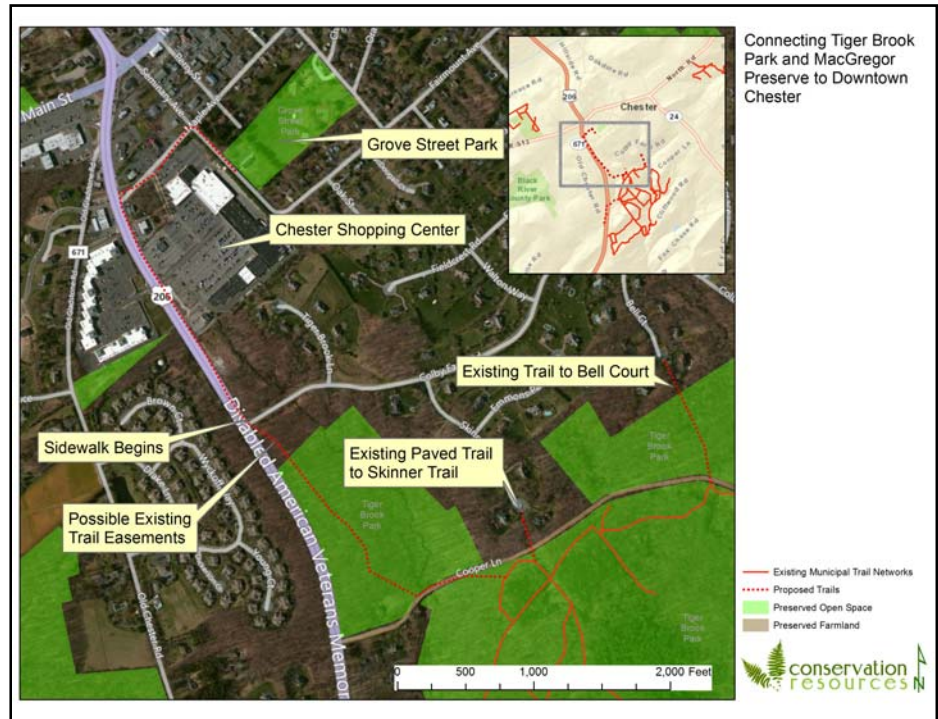


Figure 8 Proposed trail connection between Downtown Chester and Tiger Brook Park.

4. Linking Tiger Brook Park & MacGregor Preserve to Black River County Park

In addition to linking trails from Tiger Brook and MacGregor Preserve with Downtown Chester, these trails could be uniquely linked to the south with trails at the extensive Black River County Park. Using an old “cattle tunnel” under Route 206 for a trail would create a safe highway crossing and require very little work to maintain. Directly on the other side of Route 206, the Township owns land which is contiguous to the “Luce” tract, part of Morris County Park system. Another road crossing or two around the intersection with Route 206 and Old Chester Road, perhaps with just a crosswalk, will need to be

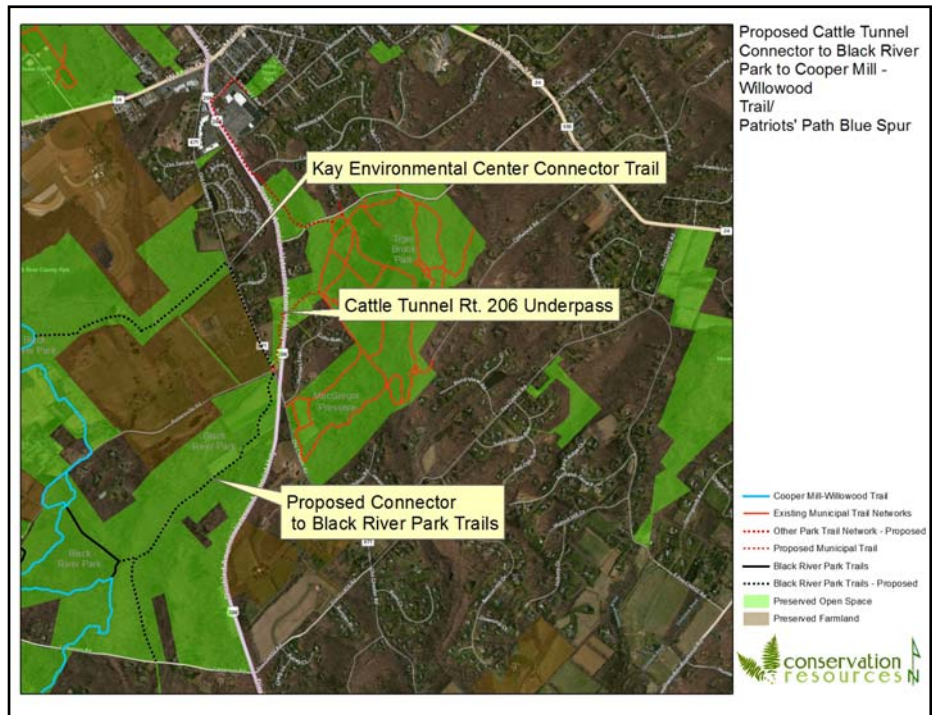


Figure 9 Proposed connection between MacGregor Preserve and Morris County Parkland.

created to link the trail.

Another potential trail would follow the proposed pedestrian-friendly improvements on Old Chester/ Old Gladstone Road (see section C) to Morris County Park Property located approximately half-mile north. This trail would lead to Kay Environmental Center. A small trailhead could also be installed here that would also serve as an entryway to Chester Trails for residents living in adjacent developments

In addition, the trails within the County Park property will need to be blazed. Existing woods roads would make ideal trails on the Luce Tract and adjoining County Property, so it shouldn't take much effort to create this connection.

Finally, the County Park trail map and the Tiger Brook/MacGregor trail maps would need to be amended in cooperation with the County. It is important to realize that the County already maintains over 32 miles of trails in Chester, so local assistance with maintenance and upkeep would be key to implementing these recommendations and likely be greatly appreciated.



Figure 10 Cattle Tunnel that can be used as trail connector. Note the flooding after heavy rains.

5. The West Morris Greenway

A well-used Patriots' Path Trailhead exists off Pleasant Hill Road. The trail follows the old railroad right-of-way north through the Black River Wildlife Management Area.

Although this is a blue spur of Patriots' Path, This trailhead could become the southern terminus of the West Morris Greenway, which would stretch from Chester to Succasunna and beyond. Outside of Chester, Roxbury Township recently worked with Morris County Parks and the Morris County Municipal Utilities Authority (MUA) to bypass a bottleneck in the route through Morris County MUA property. Like many of the trailheads in Chester, the West Morris Greenway trailhead should be better marked on Pleasant Hill Road. Additionally, improvements should be made on Oakdale Road and Pleasant Hill Road to encourage a bikeable link to downtown Chester.



Figure 11 Trail marker for the West Morris Greenway.

Improving the surface from the trailhead on the east side of Pleasant Hill Road and up Hillside Road, to meet up with the existing paved path is another way to provide a safe hiking path to Main Street. Another possibility is paving Patriots' Path leading from Black River Fields to the West Morris Greenway. This would take close cooperation with the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife. Longer term, some improvements to the surface of this trail should be considered, especially in several areas which are typically wet and somewhat muddy after storms.

The Morris County Park Commission is leading the creation of the West Morris Greenway, so Chester Trails should work closely with this effort.



Figure 12 Current Parking and Trailhead for West Morris Greenway on Pleasant Hill Rd.

6. Connecting Patriots' Path to the Mount Olive Trail System

Residents of Mount Olive Township are very interested in creating a spur of Patriots' Path that would link to their trail system. It appears that the best way to link to Patriots' Path is through private land in Chester Township off Pleasant Hill Road. Mt. Olive will be acquiring a new parcel of open space adjacent to two properties in Chester which will link to the village of Flanders and the rest of their existing trail network.

One of these Chester properties is preserved farmland and, as such, would be problematic, as public trail easements are generally not permitted on preserved farmland. The other property is a rehabilitation hospital, so there may be sensitivities about public access. Regardless, both owners should be contacted by representatives of both Chester and Mt. Olive to determine if acquiring a public trail easement would be possible at this time.

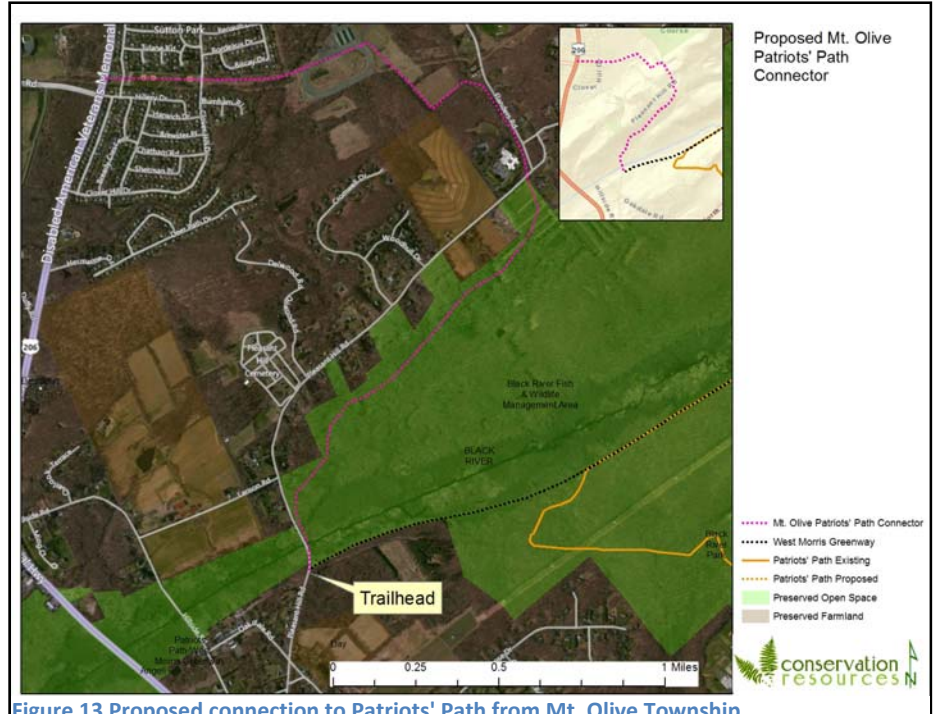


Figure 13 Proposed connection to Patriots' Path from Mt. Olive Township.

In addition to this trail easement, a new trail will have to be blazed through Black River Wildlife Management Area which will require permission from the NJ DEP Division of Fish and Wildlife. This new path should lead to the trailhead on Pleasant Hill Road.

B. Local Trail Connections

Although the current connectivity by trails between parks in Chester is amazing, there are several areas where additional trails or crossing at busy roads would make it possible to walk on trails between virtually all of the parks in town! Specifically, we have made six recommendations for creating these Local Trail Connections. Two involve Mount Paul Memorial County Park and adjacent property, two involve implementing safe crossings of busy highways, one involves creation of a trail in Chester Borough that would link Borough Fields with Oakdale Road, and the sixth would link Chester Trails with trails at Hacklebarney State Park, the most popular park in Chester.

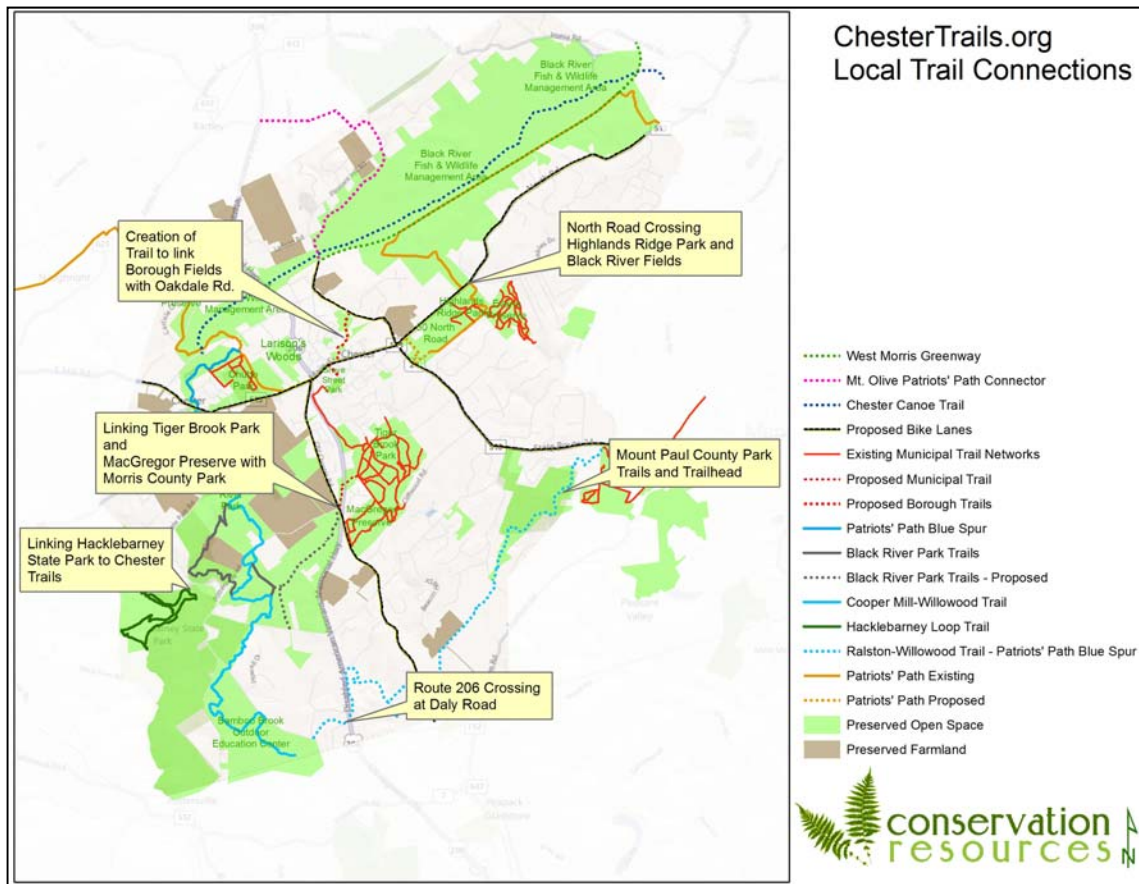
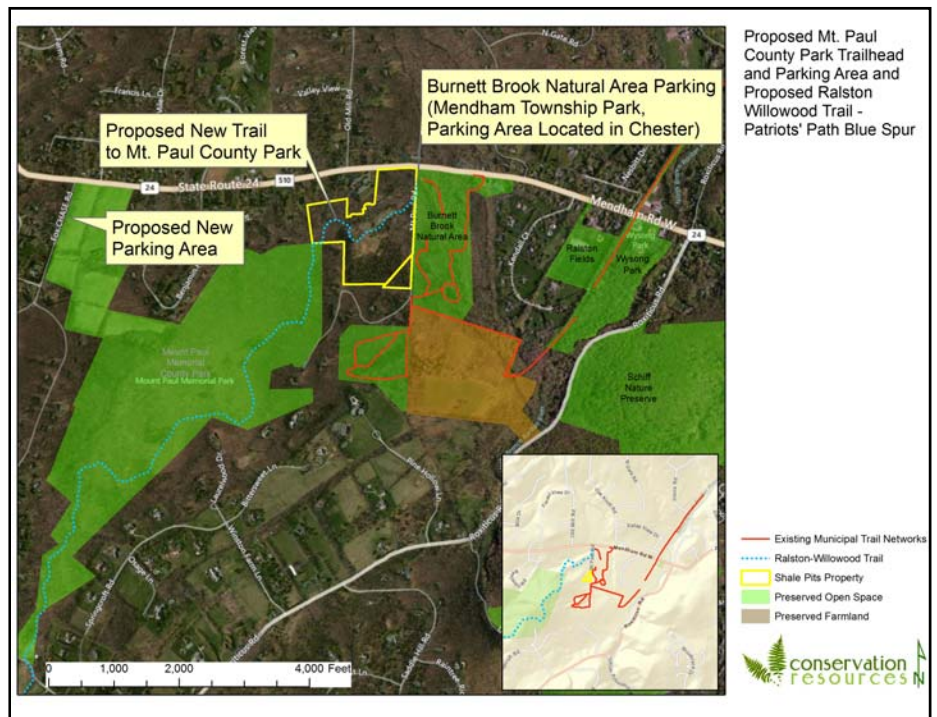


Figure 14 Potential Local Trail Connections in Chester.

1. Creating a Trailhead at Mt. Paul Preserve

While working on a crossing of Route 206 for the Patriots' Path spur will take some planning as well as some work and time to implement (see next section), creating better access to Mt. Paul County Park is a relatively simple task. Mount Paul Memorial County Park, located entirely in Chester Township, is perhaps the least developed park within the Morris County Park System. Schiff Natural Lands Trust recently acquired the 46-acre Mt. Paul Preserve which is located in Chester Township off Mt. Paul Road and is adjacent to Mt. Paul Memorial County Park. Preservation of this property creates a contiguous greenway from Mendham Township's Burnett Brook Natural Area (a portion of which is located in Chester Township) to Mt. Paul Memorial County Park.



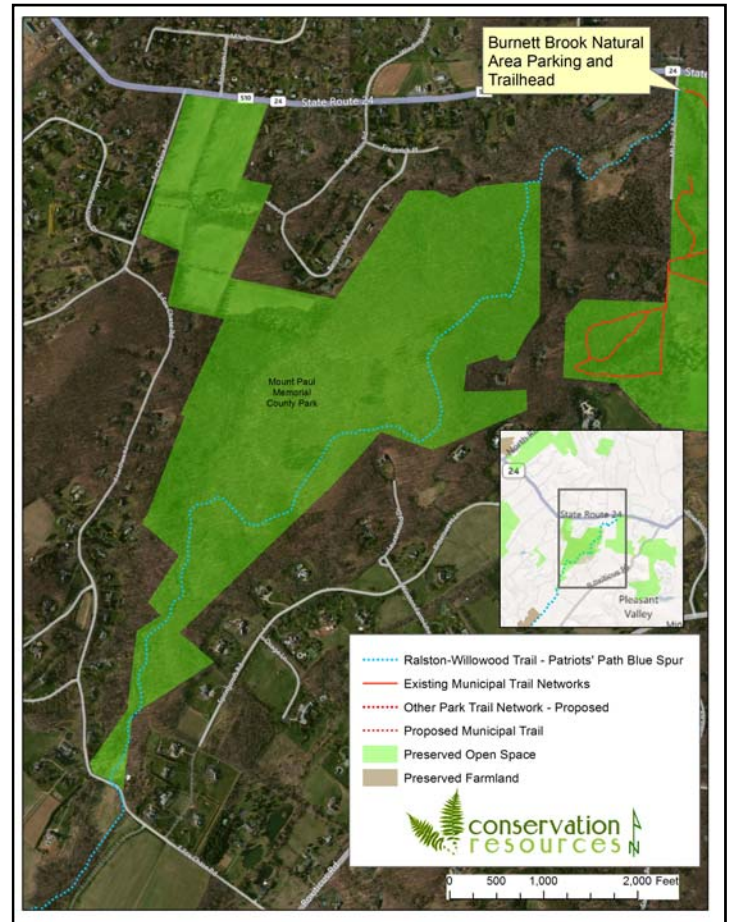
Schiff is in the process of conducting an ecological restoration of the property, as well as developing a trail that connects to Mt. Paul Memorial County Park and Burnett Brook Natural Area, which is owned and maintained by Mendham Township. Schiff creating a small trailhead parking area along Mt. Paul Road that will provide a serviceable access point for taking a hike at Mt. Paul Memorial County Park.

Chester Township should work with Mendham Township, Schiff Natural Lands Trust and Morris County to develop a shared parking area and trailhead for Mt. Paul County Park off Mt. Paul Road. Trails within Mt. Paul will need to be blazed and a trail map should be produced in cooperation with the County Parks. A County Park sign advertising Mt. Paul County Park should also be prominently posted in this area.

Another potential parking area for Mt. Paul County Park is located on Fox Chase Road. There are several existing open fields where a parking area could be located.

2. Linking Mount Paul Memorial County Park to SE Chester Trails

There are a series of informal trails that Mt. Paul Memorial County Park; however there is no obvious way for the public to access and enjoy these trails. In addition to Mount Paul Memorial County Park, the Morris County Park Commission also owns trail easements that extend from Willowwood Arboretum through the southeastern portion of Chester all the way to Mt. Paul County Park. This proposed trail is considered a “blue” or secondary spur of Patriots Path and follows a portion of the historic Rockaway Railroad right-of-way. There are several Patriots’ Path markers along existing trail easements, but the trails are not well marked, used or maintained. The County Park system would be interested in improving and maintaining this trail, however a safe crossing of Route 206 at Daly Road would be necessary in order to dedicate resources to activate and maintain these trails. Completing the trail network in this region would allow Chester residents in the southeastern portion of town to be within a mile of the Chester Trails network. Since equestrian use is also popular in this area, where appropriate, the trails should be opened for horseback riding.



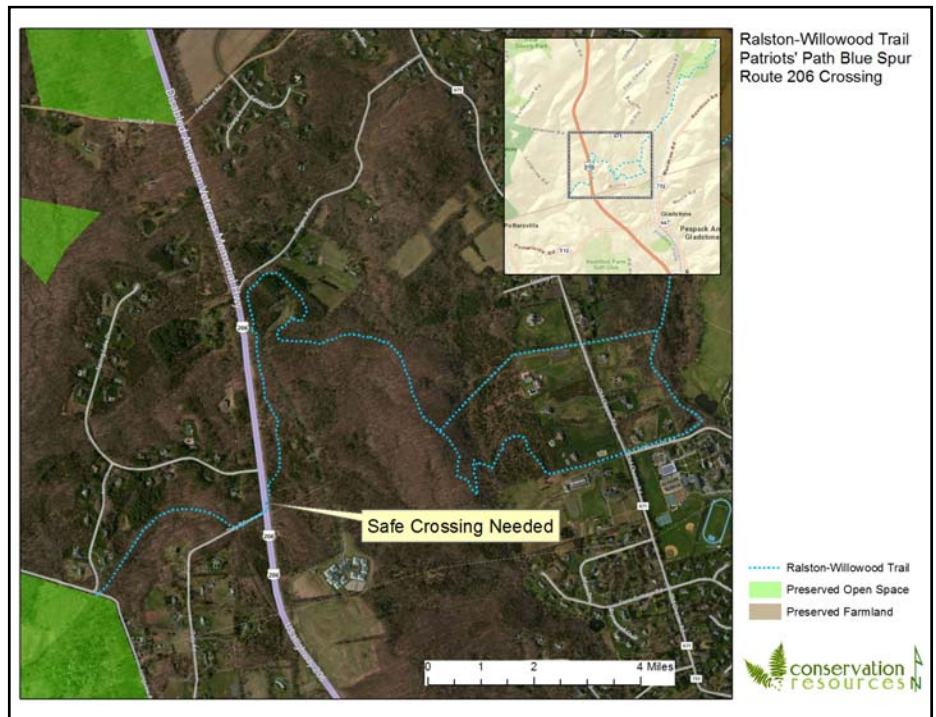
3. A Trail Crossing of Route 206 at Daly Road, Ralston - Willowood Trail

Patriots' Path is well marked and maintained from Morris County Park's Willowood Arboretum to Route 206. However, at Route 206 there is a sign which indicates that Patriots' Path ends. The reason it ends is that there is no way to safely cross Route 206 to get to the Patriots' Path trail easement on the Seeing Eye property.

A safe crossing at Route 206 should be created, but will take a substantial effort working with the NJ Department of Transportation.

Chester should work with the Morris County Park Commission and the NJ Department of Transportation to begin to determine the feasibility of a safe

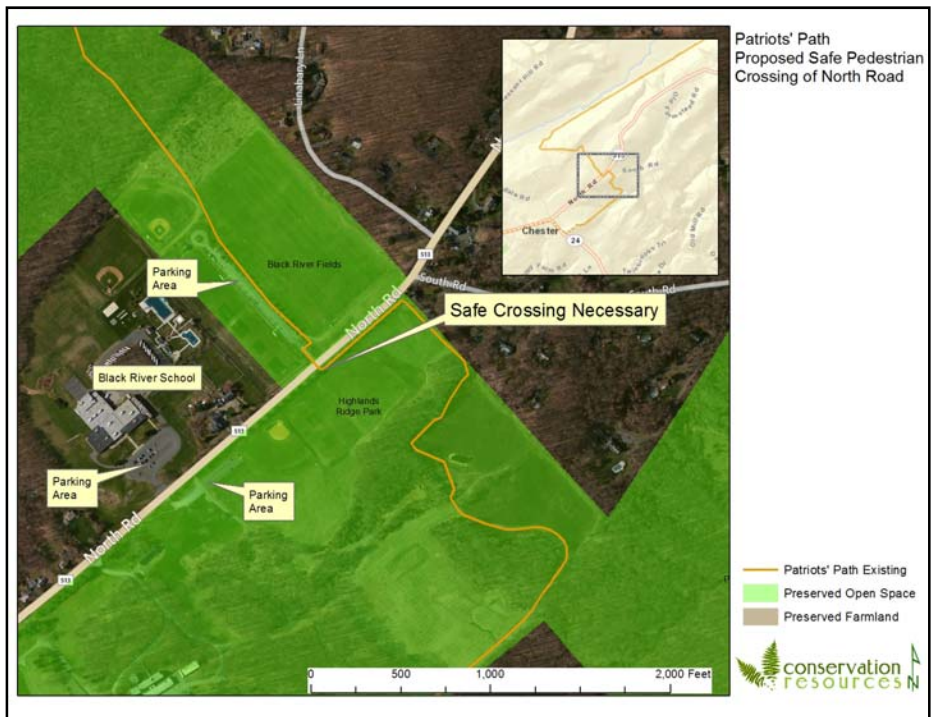
pedestrian crossing at Route 206 near Daly Road. Chester should also work with the Park Commission to do a full evaluation and determine which part of Patriots' Path blue spur east of 206 needs to be constructed, and how this could be maintained over time in order to give residents of that area access to the Chester Trails network.



4. Connecting Highlands Ridge Park to Black River Fields

Highlands Ridge Park and Black River Fields are located across from each other on North Road. Both have active recreational facilities. In addition, the main (brown-blazed) stem of Patriots' Path runs through these two properties. For both the active recreation facilities and Patriots' Path, a safe crosswalk, perhaps with a dedicated pedestrian stoplight, should be constructed. This crosswalk could also serve students at Black River Middle School and provide them with better access to these parks as well as the community center and the potential new arts center that is planned to be located at 50 North Road. The location of this crossing

will have to take into account traffic safety concerns including the speed limit on North Road, limited sight distances,



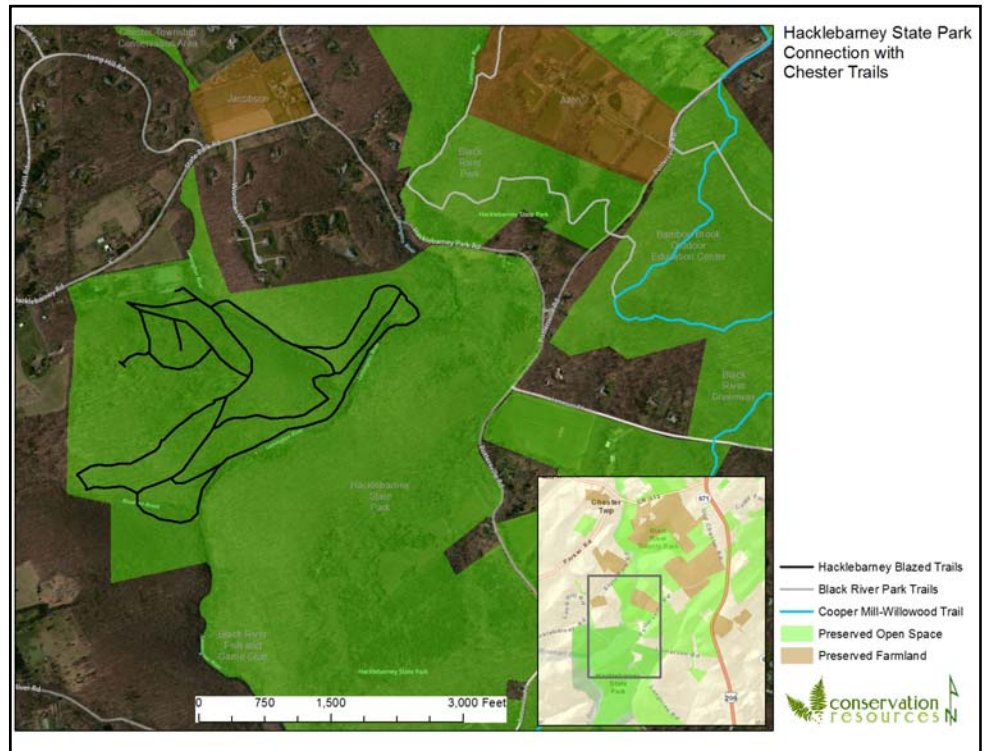
and the entrances to both the Black River School Parking Lot and the Parking Lots for the Black River Playing Fields and Highlands Ridge Park Playing Fields.



Crossing at Black River Fields to Highlands Ridge Park

5. Connecting Hacklebarney State Park to Chester Trails network

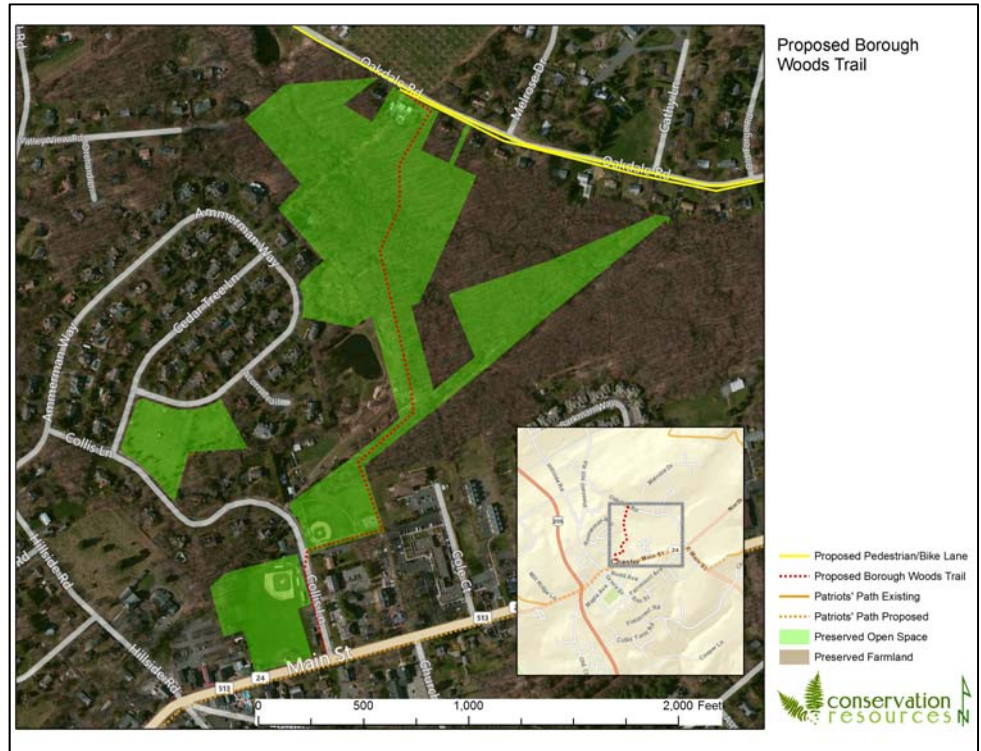
Hacklebarney State Park is located in both Chester Township and Washington Township. Our survey showed that it is the most popular hiking destination in town. Because it is a State Park and therefore has a higher profile than other parks in town, it likely also attracts residents from throughout the State. Currently, the Chester Trail network does not connect to the Hacklebarney State Park Trail Network. The core of the park contains very nice, well-marked trails. The trails in the remainder of the Hacklebarney State Park Property south of the Lamington or Black River are not well marked. Given the lack of resources at the NJDEP Park Service, it is unlikely they will have the ability to improve and expand the trails system at Hacklebarney in the near future.



Chester Trails should work with the State Park Service to see if new trails can be developed that can be linked to Chester Trails, and if these trails are developed, to plan for a way to help maintain them. The NJDEP has released a new Smartphone App for State Parks. You can download the Pocket Ranger App at <http://pocketranger.com/apps/nj/apps.php>. Hacklebarney State Park is included along with a tutorial and blog. The Pocket Ranger App has many useful attributes.

6. Creating a Trail from Borough Fields Trail to Oakdale Rd.

A new rugged hiking trail could be created between Borough Fields and Oakdale Road across wooded, Borough-owned property. Due to the terrain, this trail would not be suitable for bicycles. As articulated in the next section, Oakdale Road and a portion of Pleasant Hill Road should be improved to provide safe, bikeable access to the West Morris Greenway Trailhead on Pleasant Hill Road (see West Morris Greenway below).



C. Connecting Neighborhoods to Trails/Pedestrian and Bicycle Lanes

One of the more common responses to our survey was the request to connect Chester's neighborhoods, local schools, parks, the library, and businesses through trails. Within the Borough, most of these areas are already connected through pedestrian friendly sidewalks or residential roads. There is also a bike lane along a portion of Main Street. Connecting Chester's neighborhoods to the trail network becomes more challenging in Chester Township.

If fully implemented, the Chester Trails plan would ensure that a trail is within one mile of every Chester resident. However, many of these trails are envisioned to be rustic and rugged, and access from individual homes to the trailheads is not necessarily pedestrian friendly. Therefore, these trails may not serve the more transportation oriented needs expressed in the survey.

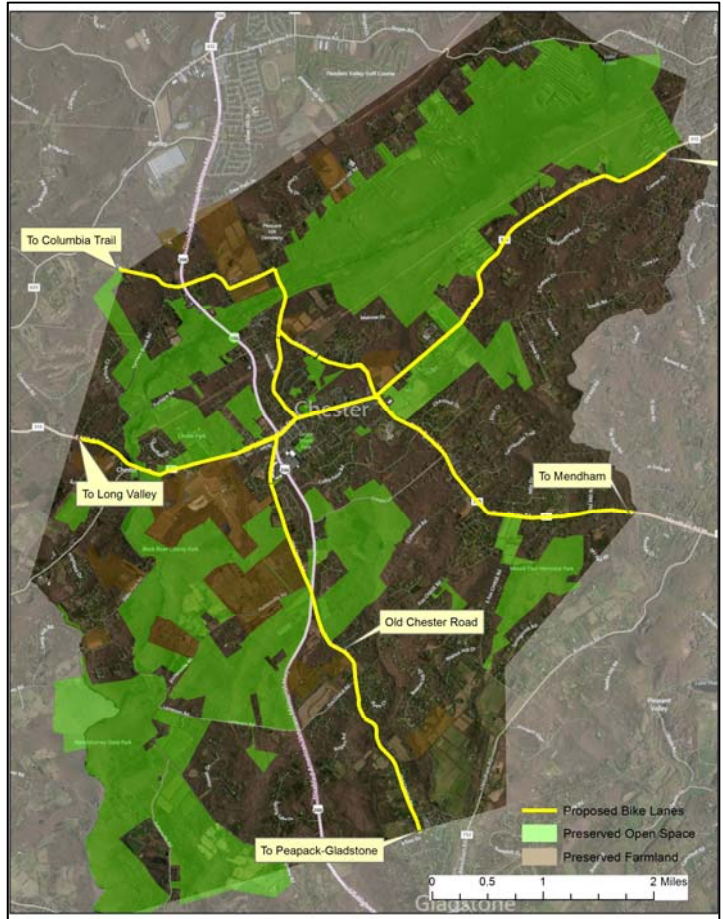
Currently, walking or biking from one area of Chester Township to another requires walking on the shoulder of a busy, high-speed road; to a large extent, sidewalks or large pedestrian or bike friendly shoulders simply do not currently exist in the Township. Chester should begin to create a pedestrian friendly network along existing roads that integrates into Chester Trails.

Initially, the main stem of a walkable and bikeable transportation network should include a wider sidewalk or well demarcated shoulder along County Route 510 (old Route 24) through Chester, County Route 513 (North Road), Oakdale Road (see West Morris Greenway) and Old Chester Road. A connection should be made to the Columbia Trail up Pleasant Hill Road, to Larison Road, to Four Bridges Road.

Chester should work with County transportation planners to consider pedestrian and bicycle access when transportation maintenance and enhancements are conducted over time.

Chester's Elementary and Middle Schools are connected through informal trails to the immediate neighborhoods surrounding them. The surface of these trails could be improved and the trails themselves formalized to better serve students and parents who would like to walk to school.

Chester's Library is connected by sidewalk to the Borough of Chester; however, as mentioned above on page 12, this trail should be significantly widened and improved. Better trail signage from Chester Borough to the Library should also be created.



D. Trail Improvements

For the most part, trails in Chester are well marked and maintained. However, in several areas trails need to be improved. Whether directional signage, consistent trailhead signs, or a better surface, these improvements would increase the number of people using the trails.

1. Patriots' Path through Chester Borough

A top priority for improving existing trails would be to mark Patriots' Path through Downtown Chester and 50 North Road. Through the Borough, Patriots' Path follows Main Street and careful attention will have to be paid to the design and location of the trail markers. We recommend that the trail should be marked on both sides of Main Street, although the crossing of Rt. 206 should take place from the north side of Main Street.

The Morris County Park Commission has provided a prototype trail marker. The colors of the prototype can be changed and it can easily be attached to existing street signs on both sides of Main Street. In addition, larger trailhead signs should be installed in strategic locations. In addition, the main Chester Trails informational kiosk should be located in the Borough so that shoppers and visitors can learn about trail opportunities in Chester. The Morris County Park Commission estimates eight to ten trail signs will be needed to mark Patriots' Path through Downtown Chester.



2. Trails at 50 North Road

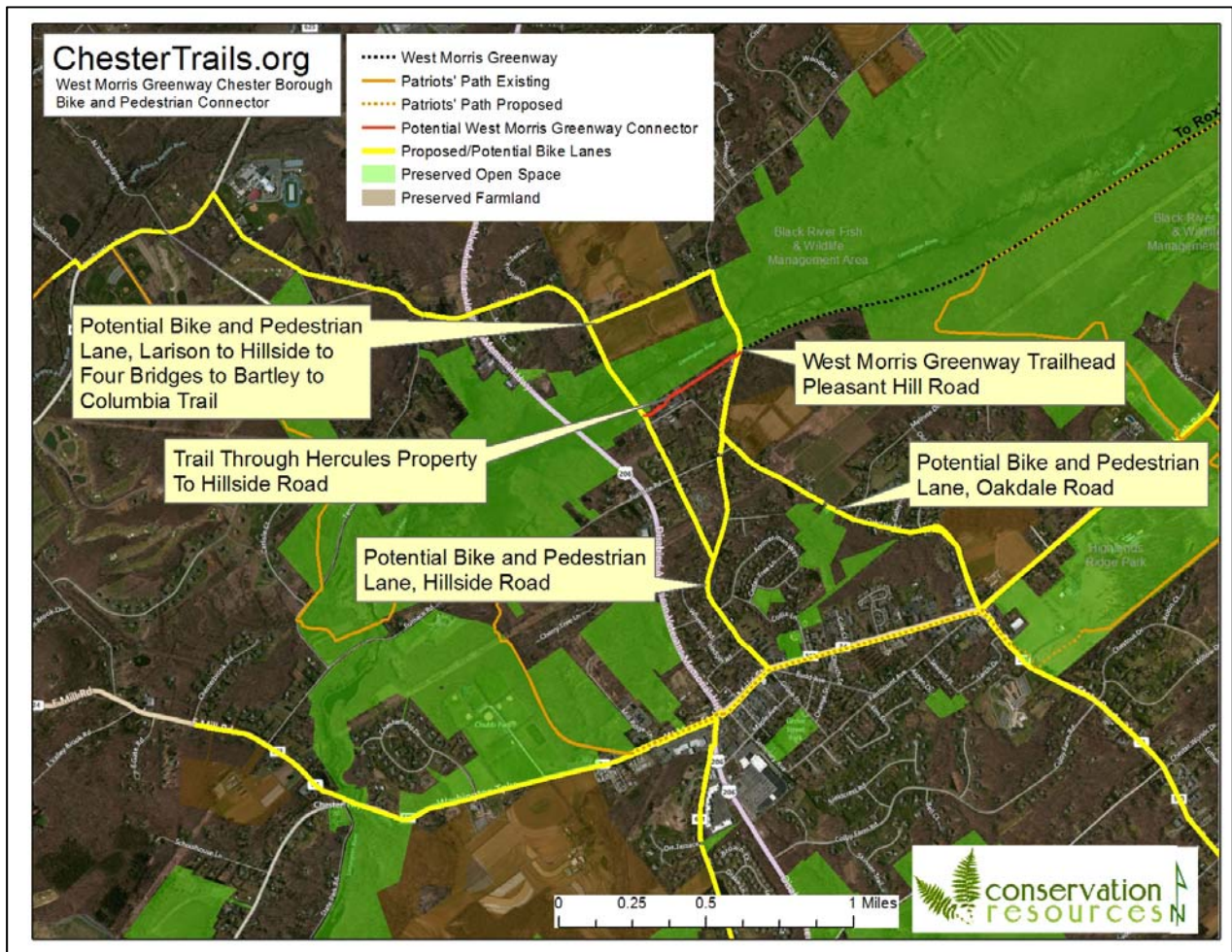
In the management Plan for 50-North Road, we recommend creating a paved trail network for light biking and strollers, a measured mile loop, and a trail to the top of Seward's Hill. Currently, there are very few parks in Chester where families can bring their children for light biking or walking. As envisioned in the plan, this large park in combination with the adjacent Highlands Ridge Park can become a focal area for the community. See *"A Recreation and Conservation Vision for the 50 North Road Property"* more details about additional trail and park development recommendations

3. West Morris Greenway to the Columbia Trail Bike and Pedestrian Lanes

One of the most significant trail improvements that could be made to Chester Trails is improving the surface of the West Morris Greenway to accommodate bicycles, specifically the section of trail from Pleasant Hill Road to the boundary with Randolph. This old railroad right-of-way could be Chester's D&R Canal State Park or Columbia Trail, attracting visitors to enjoy the beauty of the Black River Wildlife Management Area as well as downtown Chester Borough. Although this is perhaps one of the most capital intensive off-road trail projects we are recommending, we believe that, like many rail trails throughout the State and country, it would create a regional attraction that would bring many tourists to Chester.

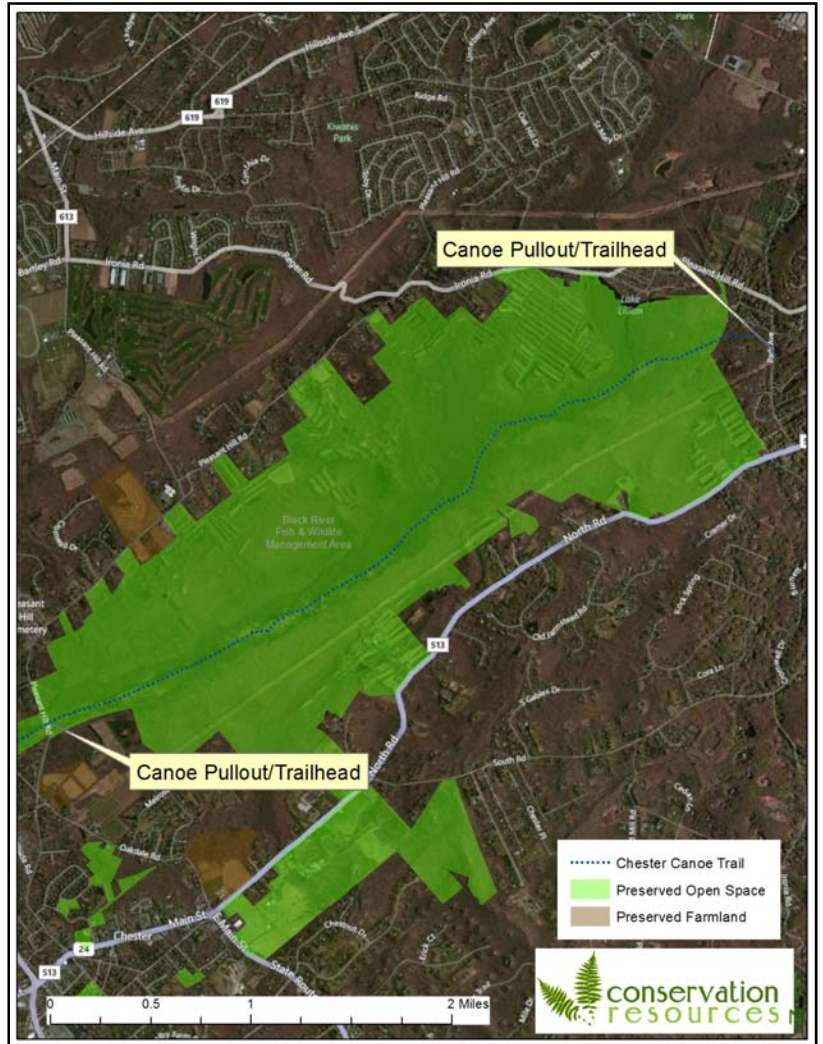
In addition to improving the West Morris Greenway trail surface, we recommend improving the connection to downtown Chester by creation of a pedestrian and bike lanes. Three possible locations for this pedestrian and bike lane are along Hillside Road to Pleasant Hill Road or Oakdale Road to Pleasant Hill Road or Hillside Road to the existing trail on the Hercules Property. However, improvements to Oakdale Road will be difficult because of the significant widening required to meet minimum standards and varying right-of-way widths.

This bike lane could also be extended to create a link to the Columbia Trail by an extension up Larison Road to Hillside, across 206 at Four Bridges Road, to Bartley Road to the Columbia Trail. Wider bike lanes on Four Bridges Road would also benefit the track team at West Morris Central who use this route for training.



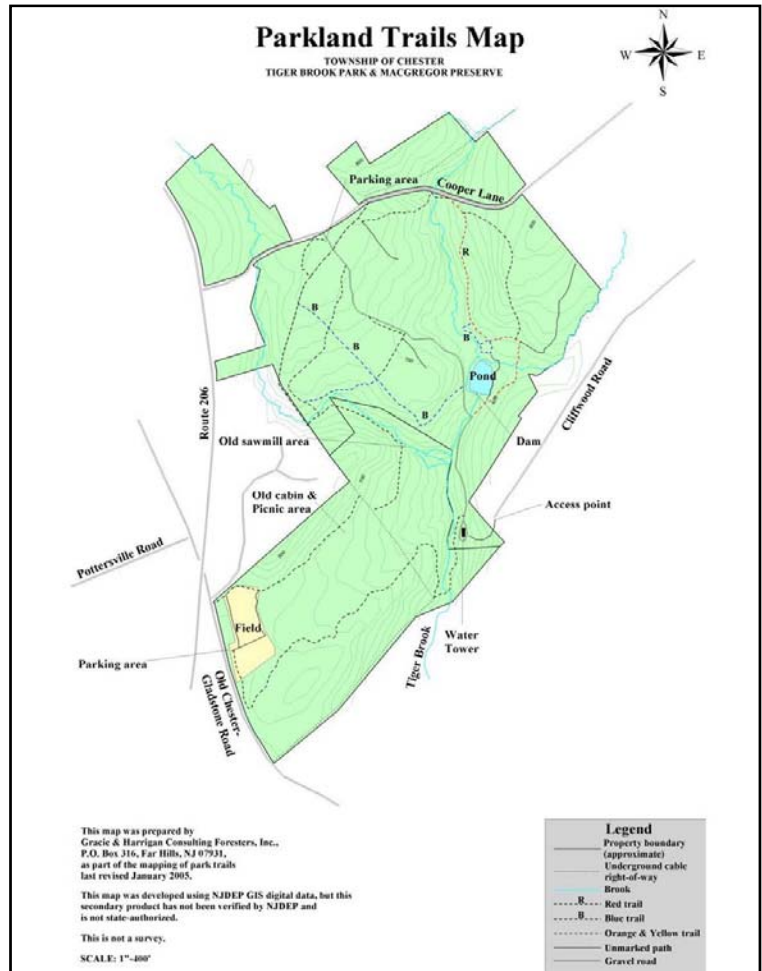
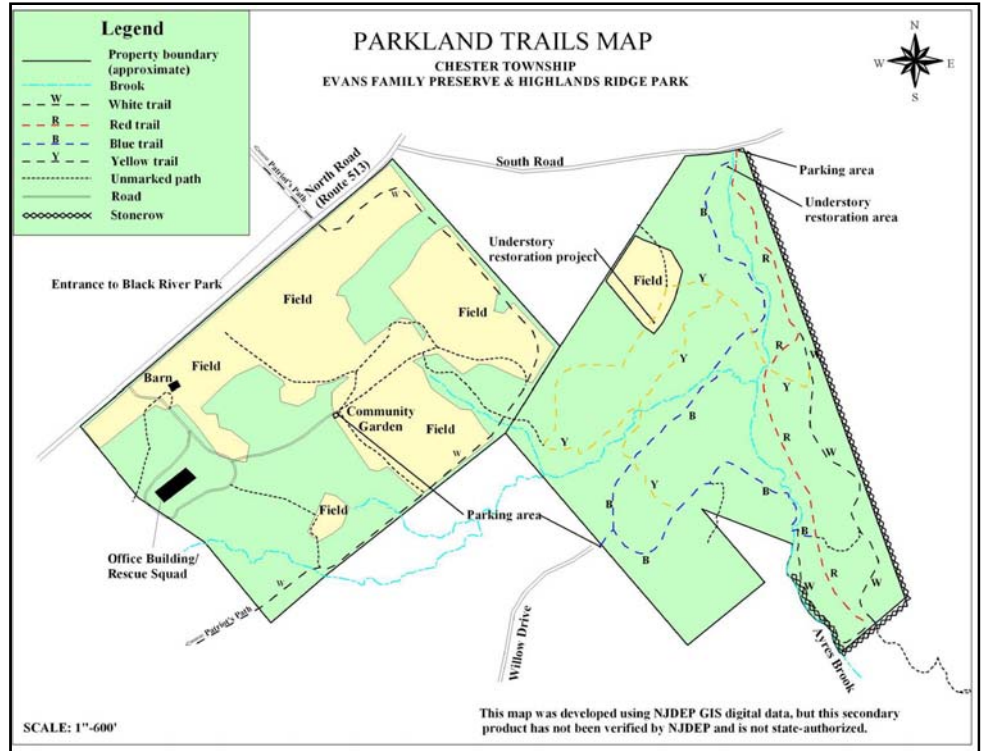
5. Chester Canoe and Kayak Trail

The Black River provides a great opportunity for a canoe and kayak trail, a potentially unique experience that would allow people to explore the Black River Wildlife Management Area. This trail would take canoers and kayakers from Pleasant Hill Road in Randolph to Morris County's Cooper Mill Gristmill. However, it would need significant trail signage and some stream clearing for it to be feasible. Just East of the West Morris Greenway Trailhead could also be used as a canoe pullout off Pleasant Hill Road, but a new pullout area may need to be created off Park Avenue. It should be noted that, at high water levels, it may not be possible to canoe or kayak under the Pleasant Hill Road and Rt. 206 bridges, and this should be factored into access planning and mapping.



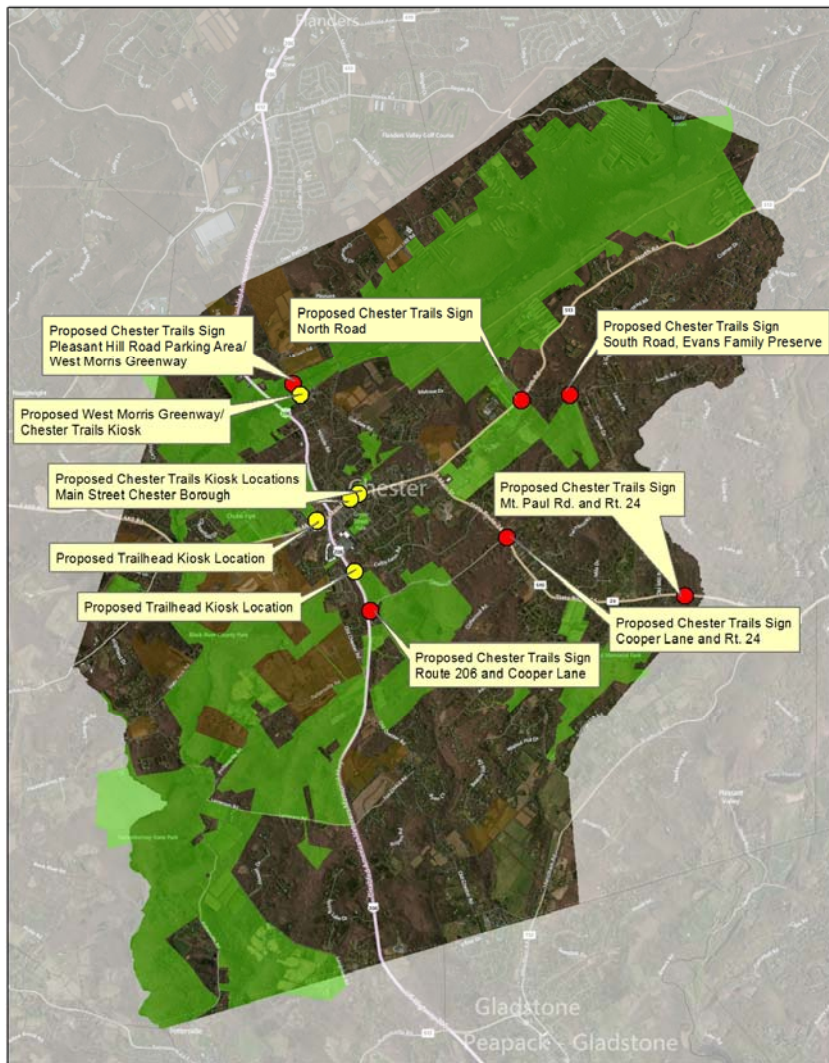
6. Creating Loop Trails and Simplifying the Trail Systems at Township Parks

Chester Township should simplify the colored blazing system within Evans Family Preserve, Tiger Brook Park, and MacGregor Preserve. This simplification of the blazing should, to the extent possible, create loop trails. Although looping back to where one started is likely the most common way to enjoy hiking these parks, loop trails are not the current way these trails are organized. For example, if someone starts to walk on a blue loop trail, they will immediately know that if they follow the trail they will end up where they started. Loop trails are also a good entry point for the novice hiker who wants to start to get comfortable with and become more familiar with local trails.



7. Signage Improvements, Trailheads, and Restrooms

One of the main ways to promote trails in Chester would be through consistent signage and new kiosks. Directional signage to trailheads should be placed at strategic locations along main thoroughfares throughout Chester. We recommend five initial locations for hiking signs and three new informational kiosks (see map below). Two kiosks could be located in downtown Chester, one at the Rockefeller Building and the other at Memorial Island. These kiosks should include information about Patriots' Path and the entire Chester Trails Network. Another other kiosk should be located off Pleasant Hill Road. All of the other well-used Parks in Chester have kiosks where information on Chester Trails should be included. Finally, we would recommend that the trails maps and kiosks have information about nearby restrooms.



E. Trail Promotion

Making Chester Trails a success will not only require new trail connections and improvement to existing trails, but also a concerted effort to promote trails and educate the public about this incredible public resource. This plan envisions trails within one mile of every resident, and regional trails that connect to adjoining communities, so a short walk or drive to a trailhead would be all that is needed to get out and enjoy the outdoors.

1. Tech Tools for Trails

The use of the internet and smartphones is revolutionizing how people interact with parks and trails. Integrating technology into trails is also becoming easier and less expensive. It is important to realize that the technology for trails only works well if the content is good. That is why it is very important to have accurate maps and information about trails. It is also important to understand that most people would still prefer to use paper maps and brochures. In addition to park-specific trail maps and hike maps, we would recommend creating a paper brochure that describes Chester Trails and includes an overall map.

a. HikeChester.org

As part of this plan Conservation Resources developed the HikeChester.org website, where park specific trail maps can be downloaded as PDFs. The idea was to create a simple website where people could go and get trail maps for all of Chester Township. In addition to a list of the trail maps, each of the trailheads in town is located on a Google Map with links to the same PDF maps. Hike specific maps similar to the maps created at HikeMendham.org would be a valuable addition to HikeChester.org. At HikeMendham.org, maps include detailed instructions on the specific hike and are categorized as easy, moderate and difficult so that people can just print a pdf and go.

Online maps are the first step to creating a smartphone-accessible way to navigate the trails in Chester. Once the various connections, links, and improvements are made, the GIS data provided by Morris County GIS and developed as part of this trails plan can be used to create an interactive mapping platform in the future. This platform could create a trail route for people, similar to getting directions from an online mapping service like Google Maps.

b. Use of QR codes

Quick Read or “QR” Codes are an easy way for smartphone users to access site specific information about trails from the internet. Most smartphones have QR readers pre-installed, but if not there are also several free QR apps available. Taking a photo with a barcode reading “app” of the QR code on the right will bring up the Chester Trails website. These codes can be generated for any website, so can be used on the trails where there are points of interest (see themed trails below.)

These codes can be placed in all of the kiosks and on signage; however there are a few ground rules for using QR codes that should be followed. First, the website or other information that these codes point to, such as the Chester Trails site, should be mobile ready. Most websites will not display properly on a small smart phone screen. Second, it should be realized that the QR code above encodes the actual web address <http://www.chestertrails.org>. It will always encode that address, so the web address and website will need to be maintained over time.



There are services that allow an administrator to manage the website where a particular QR code “points”. While a static QR code, like the one above, is free to create, a re-direct service will entail a monthly fee. However, a service will allow tracking of QR code use and enable the administrator to direct the user to any other website. So, for example, if you wanted to direct someone who used the code above to the Chester Township parks webpage instead of the Chester

Trails webpage, you could do that by simply changing the URL in the service. That wouldn't be possible using the free service above which will always direct you to chestertrails.org.

Similarly, Microsoft has its own proprietary version of a QR code. This code works similarly to the paid services, however the codes themselves are more aesthetically pleasing and the service is free. The only downside is that it requires a special app from Microsoft that would need to be downloaded to a smartphone.

We recommend using QR codes and placing them wherever there may be a point of interest.

2. Themed point of interest trails with maps accessible online

a. History trail

The Chester History Trail enables trail users and visitors to Chester to access information about the rich history of Chester on their computers and smartphones. The mobile optimized website, <http://chesterhistorytrail.wordpress.com/>, provides basic information on many of the historic sites in Chester. It is designed to be accessible on computers, smartphones, and tablet computers. There are several ways to access information on this website. Users can browse this website by clicking on a street name in the banner above or the categories at the bottom of this page. They can use Google maps to explore the site. Finally, they will be able to access information by scanning QR codes throughout Chester.



b. Geology trail

The Geology Trail was developed by Professor John Puffer, a Chester Resident and expert in the mining history of the area. It is quite technical in nature, but does include 47 points of interest along Chester's trails. Although QR codes have not been developed for all of the Points of Interest, the mobile friendly web-pages have and can be accessed by scanning the QR code to the right or by visiting <http://chestertrails.org/themed-trails-and-points-of-interest/chester-geology-trail/>



c. Chester Farming Heritage Trail

Thousands of families visit Chester to enjoy its farms. From pick-your-own fruits and vegetables, farm stands, hayrides, and corn mazes, farm business helps to support local farmers as well the local economy, while helping to preserve the rural farming character of Chester. In addition, there are two exemplary examples of restored mill buildings that relate to farming; Cooper Mill and the Ralston Cider Mill, located just outside Chester in Mendham Township. There is a great opportunity for Chester to link



several of these popular farms and sites together with a virtual trail. To create the Agritourism Trail, we'd suggest first focusing on the two publically-owned mills and several farms in particular - Stony Hill Farm, Parks Farm, Hacklebarney Farms Cider Mill, Alstede's Farm, and Riamede Farm. The Chester Farmers' Market should also be included. Information about Chester Trails and the Farming Heritage Trail should be distributed at these farms. Histories of these farms as well as information about the public benefit of Farmland Preservation should also be included.

3. Trail events

Guided hikes are a great way to show residents the Chester Trails network. These trail events should be held monthly and focus on individual portions of the Chester Trails network. They can be lead like local experts and also include events by various users – e.g. a stroller or bicycle event at 50 North Road.

Like HikeMendham.org, the project team should consider installing signs throughout town that say simply "HikeChester.org" to generate a buzz about the trail system and any upcoming trail events. The signs in Mendham get placed and taken down periodically so that the message doesn't just fade into the background.

4. Use of news media

In addition to guided hikes, Chester Trails should endeavor to educate the public about the local trail system trails in local papers such as the Observer Tribune and the Daily Record. This could take the form of advertising for events or guided hikes, or inviting reporters to learn about specific trail projects that will be implemented.

5. Volunteer trail stewards

Maintenance and creation of trails need not cost a lot of money or town resources. The Project Team should create a corps of volunteer trail stewards. They should work closely with the Morris County Park Commission which has a well-developed adopt-a-trail program for maintaining county trails. <http://www.morrisparks.net/volunteer.asp> .

Virtually all of the people who provided input into this plan have already provided their email addresses. These people showed an interest in trails and may be interested in becoming volunteer trail stewards.

IV. Action Plan

Chester Trails Action Plan			
	Task	Page #	Timeframe
Regional Trail Connections			
	<u>Linking Chester Borough to Patriots' Path E/W Morris Greenway</u>		
	Create and blaze Patriots' Path through 50 North Road per description in Chester Trails Report	9	Short Term
	Create Observation platform and other amenities on Seward's hill (see <i>Recreation and Conservation Vision for 50 North Road</i>)	9	Medium Term
	Improve and create paved trail network at 50-North Road (<i>Recreation and Conservation Vision for 50 North Road</i>)		Medium Term
	<u>Linking Chubb Park and Chester Library to Patriots' Path West</u>		
	Mark trail (Patriots' Path Main Stem) from Chester Borough to library	11	Short Term
	Improve sidewalk between Route 206 and Library	11	Medium Term
	<u>Linking Tiger Brook/MacGregor to Main Street and Grove Street Park</u>		
	Create new trail to connect sidewalk that ends at Colby Farm Road and Route 206 with Tiger Brook Preserve trail network. Extend this trail down Maple Lane to Grove Street Park.	11	Medium Term
	Improve signage to trailhead off Cooper lane	28	Medium Term
	Formalize and blaze trail connection from Skinner Trail and Bell Court	11	Medium Term
	<u>Linking Tiger Brook/MacGregor to Luce Tract</u>		
	Mark trail connecting Tiger Brook park/MacGregor Preserve through the cattle tunnel across Route 206	12	Medium Term
	Mark trail in Luce Tract to intersect with existing Black River Trails	12	Medium Term
	Create Trailhead and link on Old Chester Road and Trail to Kay Environmental Center	12	Medium Term
	Create Parking Area off Pottersville Road	12	Medium Term
	Work with Morris County to create new trail map of Black River Trails or separate map of Luce Track	12	Medium Term
	<u>Pleasant Hill Road West Morris Greenway Access and Trailhead</u>		
	Create better signage and trailhead at Pleasant Hill Road	14	Medium Term
	Improve signage, trail surface, and drainage on Patriots' path through Black River WMA	14	Medium Term
	Work with NJDEP Division of Fish and Wildlife to improve conditions for Hikers in Black River WMA	14	Medium Term
	Improve surface of West Morris Greenway	14	Medium Term
	Clean out metal debris from around trailhead	14	Short Term
	<u>Patriots' Path to Mount Olive Trail System</u>		

	Work with Mount Olive Township and approach the two landowners where a possible trail easement can be acquired.	15	Short Term
	Work with Mt. Olive Township, Morris County Parks, and NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife to mark a trail through Black River WMA to Pleasant Hill Road trailhead.	15	Medium Term
Local Trail Connections			
	<u>Burnett Brook/ Mt. Paul County Park Trailhead</u>		
	Work with Morris County Parks, Schiff Natural Lands Trust, and Mendham Township to use Burnett Brook Parking area as a trailhead for Mt. Paul County Park.	16	Medium Term
	Work with Morris County Parks and Schiff Natural Lands Trust to create a trail across the Shale Pits property.	16	Medium Term
	Work with Morris County Park about formalizing and blazing trail in Mt. Paul County Park.	16	Medium Term
	Work with Morris County Parks to create trail map of Mt. Paul County Park	16	Medium Term
	<u>Mt. Paul County Park to SE Chester Trails</u>		
	Work with Morris County to identify existing trail easements and make trail improvements (after Daly Road Crossing is completed)	18	Long Term
	<u>206 Crossing at Daly Road</u>		
	Work with NJDOT and Morris County Parks to begin planning for a safe crossing of route 206 for of Patriots' Path Blue Spur	18	Long Term
	<u>Highlands Ridge/Evans Family Preserve to Black River Fields</u>		
	Work with Morris County to create safe trail crossing for Patriots' Path main stem at North Road per report. Include blinking lights and crosswalks, if possible.	21	Short Term
	<u>Hacklebarney State Park to Chester Trails Network</u>		
	Work with Morris County Parks and NJ State Park Service to develop a connection between trails at Hacklebarney State Park and Chester Trails	20	Long Term
	Create an online trail map of Hacklebarney State Park	20	Short Term
	<u>Connect Borough Fields to Oakdale Road</u>		
	Create new trail to connect Borough Fields to Oakdale Road through Borough-owned open space	21	
Connecting Neighborhoods to Trails			
	Integrate wider pedestrian and bike lanes per the report into transportation planning	22	Long Term
	Create wider pedestrian and bike lanes on strategic roads throughout town	22	Long Term

Trail Improvements of Existing Trails			
	<u>Patriots' Path through Chester Borough</u>		
	Work with Morris County and other interested parties to design the Patriots' Path sign for the Borough	23	Short Term
	Mark Patriots' Path on both sides of Main Street through the Borough	23	Short Term
	<u>Trails at 50 North Road</u>		
	See <i>Recreation and Conservation Vision for 50 North Road</i>		Medium Term
	<u>West Morris Greenway and the Columbia Trail Bike and Pedestrian Lanes</u>		
	Work with Morris County Parks to improve West Morris Greenway trailhead at Pleasant Hill Road	23	Medium Term
	Work with Morris County to improve surface to West Morris Greenway between Pleasant Hill Road and Randolph Township	23	Medium Term
	Work with Randolph Township, Roxbury Township, and Morris County Parks to complete West Morris Greenway	23	Medium Term
	Create a bike lane on Oakdale Road and/or Hillside Road to West Morris Greenway	23	Long Term
	Create a flat, bikeable connection to Columbia Trail through "Coleman's Cut"	25	Long Term
	<u>Chester Canoe and Kayak Trail</u>		
	Work with NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife to clear and mark a canoable trail from Pleasant Hill road trailhead to Pleasant Hill Road near where it intersects with Route 513	26	Long Term
	<u>Simplifying the Trail Blazing Systems at Township Parks</u>		
	Simplify the Trail Blazing System at MacGregor Preserve and Tiger Brook Park	27	Short Term
	Simplify the Trail Blazing System at Evans Family Preserve	27	Short Term
	<u>Signage Improvements</u>		
	Create main Chester Trails kiosk on visible spot in the Borough	28	Medium Term
	Install other Chester Trails kiosks as recommended in the plan	28	Medium Term
	Install directional signage to trailheads	28	Medium Term
Trail Promotion			
	<u>Tech Tools for Trails</u>		
	Create HikeChester.org	29	Completed
	Demo QR Codes related to themed trails	29	Completed
	Online Maps at HikeChester.org, version 1.0	29	Completed
	Create and distribute paper map/ brochure about Chester Trails	29	Medium Term
	Online Trails routing tour	29	Long Term
	<u>Themed trails</u>		
	Chester Farming Heritage Trail and waypoints (part of plan)	30	In progress
	Chester Historic Trail map and waypoints, v1.0 (part of plan)	30	In progress

	Chester Geology Trail map and waypoints, v1.0 (part of plan)	30	In progress
	Light biking trail (see <i>Recreation and Conservation Vision for 50 North Road</i>)		Medium Term
	<u>Monthly trail events</u>		
	Develop series of trail events on various trails around Chester	31	In progress
	Create hikeChester.org signs to advertise HikeChester and Chester Trail Events	31	Short Term
	<u>Use of news and social media</u>		
	Create Facebook page	31	Short Term
	Create twitter account linked to hikechester.org and Facebook page	31	Short Term
	<u>Create Corps of Volunteer Trail Stewards</u>		
	Coordinate with Morris County Parks on trail maintenance techniques and their needs/"Adopt-a-Trail" program	31	Short Term
	Develop trail stewards using email list from outreach meetings and Chester Trail project	31	Short Term

V. Appendix

Chester Trails Survey and Summary of Results

Survey about Trails and Open Space Located in Chester

Chester Township and Chester Borough are collaborating to develop a plan for a walking/biking trail ecosystem that will connect significant open space, environmental, cultural and historic features in the two municipalities. Please help us to learn more about how you use the trails and open space located in Chester. We are particularly interested in your suggestions for improvements that can be made to enhance enjoyment of these areas.

I am a: (circle one) Chester Borough Resident Chester Township Resident Nearby Resident
 Chester Business Owner Other

How often do you use the trails and open space lands located in Chester? (circle one)

Frequently Occasionally Never

Chester has many parks and natural areas to enjoy. What are some of your favorite spots in Chester? Why are these your favorites?

I use the trails and open space lands in Chester for:(Select all that apply)

- hiking / walking
- biking
- running
- dog walking
- strollers for children
- wheelchairs for elderly or disabled
- cross country skiing / snowshoeing
- birdwatching
- geocaching
- kayaking / canoeing
- fishing
- exploring history of the area
- sports events
- scout activities
- sledding
- horseback riding
- child care / recreation with children
- care of elderly / disabled
- fairs / townwide events
- concerts
- enjoying scenery
- going to shops, library, etc.
- Other:

How satisfied are you with the condition of the trails located in Chester? (select one)

- Most trails are generally in excellent condition
- Some trails are in need of maintenance
- Most trails need a lot of repair and/or maintenance

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = poor and 5 =excellent, how would you rate the following about Chester's trails:

The availability of trail maps and information	1	2	3	4	5
The visibility of trail markers	1	2	3	4	5
The aesthetic quality of the trails	1	2	3	4	5
The safety of the trails	1	2	3	4	5

Comments or suggestions:

How often do you walk or bike to your errands, a restaurant, a shop, etc. from your home?

Frequently Occasionally Very rarely Never

Do you have any suggestions for where connections can be made to link neighborhoods to schools, stores, parks, historical sites, etc.?

When you walk in Chester, how would you describe your destination? (circle one)

No particular destination school stores or errands library
workplace

I don't walk in Chester other:

Which best describes your reason for walking in Chester? (circle one)

Recreation/scenery exercise cost effective convenient

Preferable to driving	environmentally friendly	no access to a car
Window shopping	other:	I don't walk in Chester

Which of these concerns do you have about walking in Chester? (select all that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of sidewalks	<input type="checkbox"/> lack of marked crosswalks	<input type="checkbox"/> lack of pedestrian signals
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of paths/trails	<input type="checkbox"/> lack of trail connections	<input type="checkbox"/> traffic conditions
<input type="checkbox"/> I have no concerns	<input type="checkbox"/> I don't walk in Chester	

When you bike in Chester, how would you describe your destination? (circle one)

No particular destination workplace	school	stores or errands	library
I don't bike in Chester	other:		

Which best describes your reason for biking in Chester? (circle one)

Recreation/scenery	exercise	cost effective	convenient
Preferable to driving	environmentally friendly	no access to a car	
Window shopping	other:	I don't bike in Chester	

Which of these concerns do you have about biking in Chester? (select all that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of on-road facilities	<input type="checkbox"/> lack of bike parking	<input type="checkbox"/> traffic speeds
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of paths/trails	<input type="checkbox"/> lack of trail connections	<input type="checkbox"/> traffic volume
<input type="checkbox"/> I have no concerns	<input type="checkbox"/> I don't walk in Chester	

Would you like to see more bike lanes in Chester? Yes No

Please explain why or why not:

Which of these present barriers to your walking or biking in Chester? (Select all that apply)

- bad weather
- hills too steep
- darkness / lack of lighting
- can't carry items
- need to transport children
- takes too long
- fear of crime
- fear of ticks, bears, or other wildlife
- problematic road or trail conditions

Other:

Which ideas would you like to see incorporated into trails and open space areas located in Chester?
(Choose all that apply)

- passive trails and greenery
- water's edge
- native species habitat
- wildflower areas
- butterfly gardens
- sports and recreation fields
- sport courts
- amphitheater for performances
- public art / sculptures
- access to waterways
- access to regional trails beyond Chester
- area for dogs to run
- equestrian use
- using internet and/or smart phones to access trail and open space information

Other:

Any other comments?

Thank you for filling out this survey. Your comments are valuable. The results of this survey will be posted on www.ChesterTrails.org later in the season. Be sure to check the website regularly for updates on the Integrated Chester Trails Ecosystem Plan.

Summary of Results of the Chester Trails Survey

Respondents: 71% Township, 18% Borough, 9% Nearby Resident, 2% other
 All respondents are occasional and frequent users of Chester trails and open space.

Favorite Parks

Park	# of votes	Reasons
Hacklebarney	47	perfect for families/all ages, trails in great shape, user friendly, outhouses, beautiful, moving water/river access, easy parking, dog friendly, clear trail markers, good for hiking and fishing
Cooper Mill to Kay Center	38	scenic, river access, outhouses, meadow, bird life, cross country skiing, area transports me to another time and place
Chubb Park	29	can walk while kids do sports, playground, measured mileage, town events, obvious trails, even surface, populated
Tiger Brook Park	17	hiking, wildlife viewing, scenery, reservoir
Grove Street Park	15	kids can play close to home and walk to town, nice place to meet people
Willowwood to Bamboo Brook	15	champion trees, flowers, native plants, bird life, peaceful, nice in all seasons
Highlands Ridge Park	13	easy dog walking, community garden, meadow, cross country skiing, sports
Black River Wildlife Management Area (near Hermitage)	11	biking, cross country skiing, remote, scenic
MacGregor Preserve	6	most undisturbed, least populated
Evans Family Preserve	4	beautiful brook
Gazebo Park	3	concerts
Mount Paul Park	3	
Black River Fields	3	sports
50 North Road	2	view, birds of prey

Top five uses of parks and open space:

95% hiking and walking
 60% enjoying scenery
 47% dog walking
 38% tie between biking and fairs/townwide events
 31% recreation with children
 51% think trail conditions are excellent
 42% think trails are in need of some maintenance
 Aesthetic quality of trails: 69% say good-to-excellent

Availability of trail maps and information:

3% excellent
 28% good
 35% okay
 19% not good
 16% poor

Visibility of trail markers:

8% excellent
 31% good
 40% okay
 not good
 poor

Safety of trails:

24% excellent
 40% good
 26% okay

Reasons for walking:

51% no destination
 42% recreation/scenery
 38% exercise
 38% walk to stores and errands
 7% shopping
 5% don't walk in Chester

Concerns about walking in Chester: (Top 5)

34% lack of sidewalks
 24% have no concerns
 15% poor traffic conditions
 11% lack of paths
 9% lack of trail connections

Reasons for biking:

51% no destination
 38% recreation/scenery
 30% exercise
 29% don't bike in Chester
 9% stores and errands

Concerns about biking: (Top 5)

25% lack of on-road facilities
 20% lack of paths/ trails
 16% traffic volume
 9% traffic speeds
 7% lack of trail connections

87% of respondents would like to see more bike lanes in Chester. Reasons given:

- shoulders are too narrow, too many fast cars are passing too close (use Randolph as a model)
- bike lanes would slow traffic and give cyclists, runners, walkers a safety buffer
- biking on roads is too dangerous for families and kids

- bike lanes and signage would make motorists more aware of others sharing the road
- many residents currently go to Loantaka, Columbia Trail, Natirar, and Freedom Park to bike and would love to stay in town to bike
- bike lanes would also be useful to runners and hikers, as the sidewalks are not level and are unpredictable
- will encourage more physical activity, exercise, good health
- bike trails through the woods (mountain biking; and road biking in nature)
- bike trails would make Chester a destination for tourists and visitors who enjoy biking

What prevents people from walking and biking in Chester? (Top 5)

- 44% problematic road or trail conditions
- 34% bad weather
- 32% lack of lighting
- 23% hills too steep
- 21% fear of ticks, bears, coyotes

What residents would like to see incorporated in the trails plan (ranked from highest to lowest)

- 68% access to regional trails beyond Chester
- 59% passive trails and greenery
- 58% water's edge
- 54% wildflower areas
- 48% access to waterways
- 46% butterfly gardens
- 45% native species habitat
- 45% areas for dogs to run
- 38% using Internet and smart phones to access trail and open space information
- 29% sports and recreation fields
- 29% amphitheater for performances
- 24% public art / sculptures
- 21% sport courts
- 9% equestrian use

The vast majority of comments fell into four categories: safety, maintenance, maps, and trail connections.

Safety:

- need to reduce speed limits and enforce them where people are biking, walking, crossing roads
- need better pedestrian crosswalks, and enforcement to make cars stop for peds
- need to know when hunting is going on along which trails and in which parks
- people are mainly afraid of ticks, but also of bears and coyotes
- some people are afraid to walk alone and want to be where it is populated, or want to get a group together for walking, biking, skiing, etc.
- too many dogs off leash, too many people do not clean up after their dogs
- some concerned about health of creeks, wondering what white foam is, etc.

Maintenance:

- storm damage needs to be cleaned up, including branches hanging precariously overhead

- keep trails passable (especially a problem in MacGregor). Develop MacGregor trails more.
- even the surface of the trail along the Black River by the Hermitage
- keep Main Street bike lane free of debris
- Black River dam pond was drained; please restore it
- need volunteer cleanup days in cooperation with the Morris County Park Commission
- many comments asking for a clear level packed gravel trail like Natirar or Columbia Trail
- also many asking for mile markers every quarter mile along these trails, especially Hermitage trail
- better trail markers in Tiger Brook Park
- add signage to let user know which way and how far to parking area or next waypoint, like they have at Hacklebarney and Cooper Mill / Kay.

Maps:

- “Basically I need to be able to: (1) choose a hike or ride depending on difficulty level and estimated time required; (2) print out a map quickly; (3) know what the landmarks and points of interest are along the trails; and (4) know where am I at all times.”
- make sure map colors correspond with trail blazes, especially in Tiger Brook Park
- make maps more accessible--”I am unaware of where this information is.”
- “Without a map, I am uneasy about hiking; I don’t know where I’ll end up.”
- “I don’t know where trails start, end, or connect.”
- train people how to use this system; maybe hold a training session at the library
- Mark maps with the following details: distances, landmarks, topography, surface, difficulty level, and which uses the trail is designated for.
- Have maps just for bike trails, rated for difficulty level.
- Use HikeMendham.org as a model.

Ideas for Trail Connections:

- “We want a contiguous system of bike paths and walking paths that keep us off the busy roads and allow us to get to activities on Main St. and at the schools and sports fields.”
- several people requested a safe route to bike from their neighborhoods to the Chester Area Pool, schools, and Black River fields
- pave a walking loop around the Black River playing fields. Mark the mileage.
- connect neighborhoods to parks, Main Street, public spaces, trails
- make a kids’ biking trail at 50-100 North Road
- make a bike trail parallel to the busiest highways, as opposed to on the shoulder of these roads
- need bike routes of varying lengths
- connect Parker Road to Alstede’s to the Library to Main Street
- safe crosswalks at traffic lights, esp. across 206 and 513. Enforcement at all crosswalks
- connect Old Farmstead Rd to Warren Cutting to Evans to Highlands Ridge Park
- connect 50-100 North Road to the neighborhoods east of Rt. 24, down to Cliffwood and Twinbrook