

Appendix C

A through trail between DiCaprio Park and Western Avenue

(A proposal submitted to the Albany Pine Bush Commission Technical Committee on July 10, 2001-Appendices omitted)

The Town of Guilderland Pathways Committee (GPC) wishes to develop a trail, suitable for hikers, mountain bikers and cross country skiers, in the Pine Bush Preserve between Western Avenue at Winding Brook Drive and the Town of Guilderland's planned DiCaprio Park off Lydius Street. The trail would use existing "official" trails in the Preserve as much as possible, but new trails would be needed west of Old State Road and across the East Branch of the Hunger Kill. Two bridges would be needed, one to cross the East Branch, and one to cross a tributary of the West Branch near the southern tip of the DiCaprio Park. The GPC would seek Town and State funding and grants for the bridges.

This proposal is being submitted by the GPC to the Pine Bush Commission Technical Committee for its consideration. Our hope is that the Technical Committee will approve the concept for a trail as described in this document, and that the Commission will view such a trail as a desirable part of the overall recreation plan for the Preserve. If so, the GPC will be very pleased to work closely with the Commission on the exact location and development of the trail.

Background

The Guilderland Pathways Committee (GPC) was established by the Guilderland Town Board in March, 2000 as an outgrowth of the process leading to a Draft Comprehensive Plan that was formally presented to the Town Board in June, 2000. Based on extensive community interest in improving the infrastructure to facilitate walking, bicycling and using other non-motorized modes of transportation in the Town of Guilderland, the Plan recommended formation of a committee whose purpose would be to formulate a strategy for the development of a comprehensive pathways plan for the Town. The importance of pathways and support of non-motorized means of transportation in the Town was maintained in a revision of the Draft Plan that was presented to the Town Board in January, 2001, and in a further revision that was presented to the Town Board in June, 2001.

The mission of the Guilderland Pathways Committee is to create a comprehensive plan for sidewalks and non-motorized recreational paths throughout the town of Guilderland, and to promote the development of safe, alternative means of non-motorized transportation in the Town of Guilderland, for both commuting and recreational purposes.

The GPC has outlined conceptual plans for both sidewalks and recreational trails in the Town. One major objective of these plans is to connect neighborhoods with amenities—parks, shopping, library, schools, the YMCA, natural areas—by bicycle and foot paths.

Its investigation of desirable and potentially feasible locations for paths has evolved into a vision of a unified trail system.

The Guilderland Greenway Trail.

The Guilderland Greenway Trail System, currently in its conceptual stage, is to be a connected network of trails in eastern Guilderland for walkers, joggers and cyclists. It will be attractive to outdoor recreational enthusiasts seeking a substantial outing, but many more residents will use portions of the trail either to travel from one part of the town (e.g., the Lone Pine area) to another (e.g., the Library,) or to just enjoy a pleasant sojourn in attractive natural surroundings (e.g., along the Normans Kill or in the Pine Bush).

The core of the conceptual trail system is the Greenway Loop, approximately 12 miles long. This Loop, with its attached spurs, would connect:

- Two important natural areas (the Pine Bush and the Normans Kill);
- Four schools (Farnsworth Middle School, Guilderland Elementary, Pine Bush Elementary and Lynnwood Elementary Schools);
- Two historic sites (Schoolcraft House and the Battle of Normans Kill site);
- Five Town parks (Nott Road Park, DiCaprio Park, Lone Pine Park, Keenholts Park and Tawasentha Park);
- Two Townwide cultural/recreation centers (the YMCA and the Guilderland Public Library)

with the extensive residential neighborhoods of Westmere, Guilderland (Willow St.), Fort Hunter/Lone Pine, Williamsburg and McCormack's Corners. A description of the proposed trail system is given later in this document, and a concept map is appended.

The Pine Bush Trail

The section of the proposed trail through the Pine Bush Preserve between Guilderland Elementary School and DiCaprio Park (off Lydius Street) is a crucial part of the overall Guilderland Greenway Trail concept.

This section of trail would provide the only feasible off-highway link between the extensive residential neighborhoods in the Lone Pine/Fort Hunter area west of the Pine Bush preserve and the town-wide amenities in the Western Avenue/Winding Brook Drive area: the YMCA, the Guilderland Public Library, and Nott Road Park. None of the highways connecting the Lone Pine area to the Library have adequate sidewalks or bicycle lanes. In particular, despite being part of New York State Bike Route #5, Western Avenue both east and west of Winding Brook Drive has major gaps in its bike lanes, and lacks sidewalks along most of its length between Routes 155 and 146. Providing them would require substantial engineering, construction and property acquisition costs because of the terrain and the lack of right-of-way, both near the

Kaikout Kill, east of Winding Brook Drive, and near the Hunger Kill, east and west of Willow St.

The Pine Bush trail would serve as a prime recreational attraction for Town residents. The attractiveness of such a trail will be obvious to persons familiar with the Pine Bush.

The Pine Bush trail could also ultimately help connect the Guilderland Pine Bush Preserve and various neighborhoods in the Town of Guilderland to the planned Pine Bush Greenway in Albany and Colonie.

Sections of the Pine Bush Trail

What follows is a detailed description of various sections of the proposed Pine Bush trail that would connect Western Avenue at Winding Brook Drive to DiCaprio Park and the Lone Pine/Fort Hunter area of the Town.

1. Between Western Avenue and the existing Pine Bush trail system.

From the northern end of the playground of the Guilderland Elementary School a well-worn trail marked with painted red squares connects the school grounds to the yellow trail between Willow Street and Route 155. From the junction of the red square and yellow trails an extensive network of official and unofficial trails connects to Willow Street near the parking lot, and also connects to the northernmost junction of the official red trail and the power lines. That junction is the eastern starting point for the proposed new cross-East Branch trail (see below).

The Guilderland School District has posted rules for use of the Elementary School Grounds. These rules appear to be completely compatible with use of the school grounds by pedestrians and bicyclists wishing to use the Pine Bush trail system. The text of the sign is attached as an appendix. Thus the GPC does not anticipate difficulties with use of the School grounds.

However, in the event that the School District objects to a formal trail through the elementary school grounds, the GPC has located and marked (with pink tape) a reasonable alternate route. This route begins on Western Avenue near the eastern edge of the frontage of Preserve lands on Western Avenue, and proceeds northeasterly, partly on an informal trail created by the neighbor to the east, and partly on an existing narrow path, back to the ridge immediately to the north of the School grounds. Then the proposed route would skirt the ridge to the west and come out on the red square trail near the bend where the red square trail (heading south) turns from the south towards the southeast. This proposed route could require some building up of the trail in areas that may be muddy in the springtime, but otherwise would require only trail markers and brush clearing, especially adjacent to Western Avenue.

Between the trailhead on Western Avenue and the signalized intersection and crossing of Western Avenue at the School entrance and Winding Brook Drive, a sidewalk/multi-use

path would be needed. However, such a sidewalk (to connect the Library-YMCA area to the long-established neighborhood near Willow Street) is already on the GPC's (long) list of sidewalk needs for the Town, independent of this proposal.

2. Across the East Branch of the Hunger Kill

Members of the GPC have made several exploratory trips along the East Branch of the Hunger Kill with the assistance of Pine Bush Commission staff (Joel Hecht, Albert Joerger), seeking a suitable crossing point of the stream.

Finding an acceptable crossing point proved to be difficult. The East Branch has cut a steep V-shaped ravine through the sand, leaving on both sides of the stream along most of its length terrain so steep as to be impossible for mountain bikers and strenuous for hikers. Less steep areas are often wet. Attempting to develop trails with switchbacks would lead to severe erosion issues.

The criteria used for judging a crossing point were

- the crossing and adjacent trails should be entirely on public land;
- possible trail routes from the crossing should not be too steep for mountain bikers, and would not require extensive trail construction (switchbacks, retaining walls);
- trails from the crossing should connect efficiently with the existing trail system.

Two possible crossing points were examined and discarded based on these criteria. One, at the dam used to store water to irrigate the Pine Haven Country Club, is presently used, but was rejected both for steepness and because it lies on land owned by Pine Haven. A second, much farther up the stream and apparently also used by mountain bikers, appeared to have excellent access to the west, but was rejected both because part of the western route lay on private land (of a landowner off Old State Road opposite Lydius St.), and because no feasible eastern route could be found.

The crossing point we propose, found with the assistance of Joel Hecht, is quite close to transept SW 4, 2 (as marked on a tree just northeast of the crossing point). It has a western access route that involves two short pitches very near the stream that may be too steep for most mountain bikers, but otherwise is acceptable, and has very gentle slopes to the east.

To reach the crossing point from Willow Street or the Guilderland Elementary School, the route would use the existing official trails, and in particular the red trail past the area recently (5/10/01) denuded of vegetation, to the intersection of the red trail with the Power Line ROW. From there, a proposed new trail of a few hundred feet would need to be opened, following an old overgrown roadbed until it reaches a well-established unofficial trail that runs north from the power line ROW at the small wetland and follows the top of the slope along the East Branch. North along that trail perhaps 25 feet leads to a point where a proposed new trail would proceed down a gentle slope to the East Branch.

The chosen crossing point would need a bridge of perhaps 50 feet.

On the west, the new proposed trail would rise fairly steeply up the slope to the height of land. Part of this section would not be bikeable except by exceptionally fit cyclists, but is short. Once up on the top of the slope, a level path of perhaps 75 yards would connect to the (formerly) official red trail shown on the 1997 Trail Map. Turning right on that trail leads efficiently to a trailhead on Old State Road within sight of Lydius Street, while turning left leads the hiker on a longer route where one can see, on the left, portions of the Pinehaven golf course and the small pond next to the course. That trail comes out on Old State Road at trailhead No. 9 on the 1997 map, almost opposite the old road that runs from Old State Road to Lydius Street.

The route of the proposed new trail between the powerline ROW and the west side red trail has been marked by pink or orange ribbon on small-diameter trees: two bands means a turn, one means the route continues straight. The easternmost point of the new trail has been marked by a single pink ribbon tied to a cable attached to the westernmost power pole by the intersection of the red trail and the power line ROW.

In addition to the bridge, this new trail would require some erosion control measures on the west side of the East Branch. Otherwise, only brush clearing and installation of trail markers would be needed.

2a. The Bridge

If the principle of a trail crossing of the East Branch of the Hunger Kill is acceptable, the GPC hopes to get an estimate of the cost of constructing a suitable bridge across the stream, and then seek a combination of municipal and grant funding to construct the bridge.

3. From Old State Road to Siver Road.

We could not find an existing trail, official or unofficial, connecting Old State Road to Siver Road through the Preserve.

An old road (shown on the 1997 map as a red trail) heads north from Old State Road across from Trailhead No. 9 towards Lydius Street. An initial exploration revealed that between that old road and Siver Road just south of Tim Sheehan's house (the southernmost residence on the west side of Siver Road), the land is mostly open woods with gentle slopes. There would be no difficulty and virtually no cost in creating a trail between Siver Road and Old State Road.

4. From Siver Road to DiCaprio Park.

Two exploratory hikes in this area, one with Steve Feeney, one with Joel Hecht, found a feasible route for a trail west of Siver Road.

An old road runs from Siver Road just south of Tim Sheehan's house into the Ford-Feeney parcel. The proposed trail would follow that road until the road turns south. Then the trail would leave the road and continue west along the height of land beside the ravine and secondary stream that separates the Ford-Feeney and Mrozek parcels, until it reaches a location for a gentle descent to the stream a couple of hundred feet east of the intersection of that stream and the West Branch of the Hunger Kill. The trail could then proceed west a short distance to wherever is judged to be the most appropriate place for a small bridge, of an estimated 25-30 feet in length, to cross the stream. (Or a very substantial tree trunk that lies across the stream could be leveled and used as is.) On the north side of the crossing, the trail could then continue west a short distance to meet an existing road that descends from the southern corner of the DiCaprio fields to the junction of the stream with the West Branch.

The proposed route of the trail from the height of land across the stream has been marked with pink tape.

Development of this portion of the trail would require only clearing of downed branches, installation of trail markers, installation of some logs to divert runoff on the portion of the trail that descends to the small stream, and construction of a simple bridge across the secondary stream.

5. A connection to the Pine Bush Greenway.

Connecting the Guilderland Greenway with the Pine Bush Greenway would form an attractive trail system that would enhance the value of both Greenways.

A possible connector could run from the northernmost trailhead on Old State Road of the trail system east of Old State Road, to the Pine Bush Greenway, by proceeding along Old State Road over the Thruway, then following the Niagara Mohawk power line right-of-way. Such a route would be more satisfactory if the Old State Road bridge over the Thruway were widened to accommodate bicycles and pedestrians. Presumably that bridge will be reconstructed sometime in the next decade: the Thruway Authority should be made aware of the desired use of that bridge for non-motorized travel.

Benefits to the Pine Bush of the Guilderland Greenway

1. The portion of the Pine Bush east of the East Branch of the Hunger Kill presently suffers from heavy use by mountain bikers who do not stay on existing trails, but also use fire breaks and other informal trails. (In fact, there is a mountain biking trail map of the Pine Bush available on the internet: see <http://home.att.net/~dackout/pinebush.htm>)

A copy is appended.

At present, mountain bikers use the Pine Bush almost exclusively east of the East Branch. This is the portion of the Pine Bush Preserve in Guilderland that has the most "classic" pitch pine-scrub oak pine barrens ecology. West of the East Branch, the Preserve is much closer to typical eastern forest, and it will take many years of intervention to restore classic pine bush ecology to a large portion of the area. If the classic ecology is the most fragile and the most important to preserve, it would seem to make sense to open up the area west of the East Branch for greater recreational use by hikers and mountain bikers, to help reduce the recreational pressure on the area east of the East Branch.

2. The development of a through trail between Western Avenue and Lone Pine Park could provide a route of sufficient length and interest to mountain bikers that they might prefer to remain on the established trail rather than traveling more randomly through the Pine Bush. If the entire Guilderland Greenway trail is ultimately developed, or if a suitable connection is made to the Pine Bush Greenway, then mountain bikers will have a system of linear trails that should be more than adequate to keep their interest while remaining on official routes.

3. A Guilderland Greenway trail through the Pine Bush will promote the goal of the Pine Bush to support appropriate recreational use of the Pine Bush, and will increase the "ownership" of the Town of Guilderland and its residents in the Pine Bush Preserve and its objectives. In the past, many residents of Guilderland have tended to think of the Pine Bush as an "Albany" thing, because the vast majority of the controversy related to the Pine Bush has involved development in Albany, and the most visible and popular access point to the Pine Bush is in Albany, next to SEFCU. As more residents of the Town discover the beauty and uniqueness of the Guilderland Pine Bush, more will come to understand that the Pine Bush is a major Guilderland asset as well, and will become stronger advocates for the multiple values that the Pine Bush wishes to preserve.

The Guilderland Greenway Trail Concept

The Pine Bush trail proposed in this document is part of a conceptual Guilderland Greenway trail. The main portions of the proposed trail are as follows:

On the west, beginning at the Pine Bush School at Carman Road and Coons Road, the trail would roughly follow Fuller Station Road to the Watervliet Reservoir Dam. Between Western Avenue and the Pine Bush School it may be possible for the trail to utilize portions of the Niagara Mohawk power line right of way, adjacent to Fuller Station Road, on the bed of the former railroad line that in the 19th century went from Guilderland Center into Rotterdam and Schenectady, with a stop at Fuller Station. (North of the Thruway the railroad bed appears to have been covered by I-890.) (The Town has held an initial discussion with a Niagara Mohawk representative: NiMo is willing to consider use of the power line ROW for a non-motorized trail provided that the Town assumes liability, NiMo retains the ability to maintain the lines, and there is no objection from any of the adjacent landowners.)

On the south, the trail would travel along the Normans Kill. From west to east the trail could follow the stream from the Dam of the Watervliet Reservoir to Tawasentha Park on Route 146. A major portion of this section of the trail would lie on the Drebitko parcel, the site of the Battle of Normans Kill. The Albany County Land Conservancy is presently attempting to purchase this parcel for public use, and the proposed trail is highly compatible with the preservation of this parcel.

Between Tawasentha Park and Nott Road Park the trail would have to avoid the National Guard rifle range on the Normans Kill off Grant Hill Road. It could do so by going south--connecting to Ostrander Road on Park land, then using Ostrander, Wormer and Grant Hill Roads to reach the old Nott parcel frontage on Grant Hill Road just north of the Normans Kill. Or the trail could proceed on the north side of the Normans Kill, crossing the property of two large landowners: Western Turnpike Golf Course, and Pruskowski's farm, to reach Grant Hill and the old Nott parcel. Negotiations by the Town to purchase most of the Nott parcel are in progress (as of 6/15/01). If successful, then the trail could use the Nott parcel between Grant Hill Road and Nott Road Park, and beyond, to Route 155, where new bike lanes and sidewalks planned for a 2002 or 2003 reconstruction of the highway will connect the trail to the residential neighborhoods to the east of Route 155.

On the east, the trail would travel along or near the Hunger Kill, partly on the Nott parcel, if available, from Nott Road Park through or around Fairwood Apartments to the YMCA, then adjacent to Winding Brook Drive (on land of Beltrone and Lucarelli that has been proposed for development several times in the last decade) to the Guilderland Elementary School, crossing Western Avenue at the new signalized intersection at Winding Brook Drive.

On the north, the trail would wind through the Pine Bush Preserve from Guilderland Elementary School to the DiCaprio parcel, then to Lone Pine Park on a planned path that will cross the West Branch on an existing culvert on the DiCaprio parcel. Between Lone Pine Park and Pine Bush Elementary School the trail would follow DiBella Drive and Coons Road, residential neighborhood streets.

Potential spurs under consideration:

- From the NiMo ROW to Lynnwood Elementary School (off Old State Road) through a development (Brenn-Breit) presently before the Guilderland Planning Board;
- from the Reservoir Dam to Keenholts Park in Guilderland Center via a piece of French's Mill Road, now closed to traffic;
- from the YMCA to 20 Mall via a path adjacent to but off Western Avenue;
- from the Pine Bush at Old State Road south of Lydius St. to the planned Pine Bush Greenway via the Old State Road over the Thruway and the NiMO power line ROW north of Old State Road.

The GPC plans to seek a grant later this year to help develop a comprehensive plan for trails in the Town, starting from the concept presented in this document.