

To: Richard Deane
From: Zoe Richards
Re: Thoughts on connecting and promoting natural areas in Burlington
Date: March 22, 2017

A goal: build a Trail Around Burlington.

What steps are needed to create a connected, well-signed, publically accessible trail network through Burlington's many natural areas and open spaces—that links to the existing bike path?

The Situation Today:

- *“48 miles of trails is great but too bad they aren't connected. Can't get there from here!”*
~comment from Ward 6 resident at 2013 public meeting about open space in Burlington.

Consider this running/biking trip through Burlington: start at McNeil, head north through the Intervale, cross through vegetable farms and corn field, pass the Ethan Allen Homestead, over the 127 pedestrian bridge and into Ethan Allen Park, hazard a trip across North Avenue and down to the Elks Club. Travel through their parking lot, and along their land to the bike path. Travel south and turn into Rock Point, wind your way along the cliffs and back out to the bike path, then through the maze of homemade mountain bike trails on the Arms Grant to finish at the high school. Phew, you didn't get lost.

Or consider this: a determined hiker could work her way along the west side of the Winooski River from South Burlington to the mouth of the river. It's many miles of fragmentary homemade and formal trails, in many spots without signs or official sanction. But the point is: the land is open and mostly public and potentially connected as a major new trail corridor for our city that could link with the existing bike path.

These—and many similar courses throughout Burlington—are favorite outings of many citizens.

Along the way, the hiker or biker may have visited beautiful wild spaces, public parks, productive gardens and farms, urban forest, vacant lots, remnant sand dunes, or an historic cemetery. They will have traveled through rich and ecologically (and agriculturally) valuable river floodplain acreage. They may have seen globally rare plants. They will have traveled on wildlife corridors traveled by bobcat, moose, fox and mink.

But it is strictly a do-it-yourself operation of only those in the know. These courses may cover many land ownerships and managers including the Intervale Center, Winooski Valley Park District, Burlington Parks & Rec, Episcopal Diocese, BHS, Elks Club and UVM.

Many of the trails—and potential pathways—have no signage, maps, parking, or interconnections. And—except for the bike path—there is little shared vision of how the many pieces of conserved and open land in the city are, or could be, connected to each other.

Therefore, some questions to consider:

- How can we improve this situation on our wild and natural lands in the city?
- Who can help to shepherd management of this undervalued green asset--to make it not just connected in a haphazard manner, but formally connected for citizens by trails, signs, programs?
- Can we encourage more money toward trail improvements, trail reduction, programs to expand access, and signage?
- On the largest scale, how can we do a better job of celebrating, promoting, conserving and using our natural and wild areas?