

---

## **Review for Inclusive Design of City of Andover Rail Trail at Haggetts Pond**

September 22, 2016



January 2, 2017

**Introduction:**

At the invitation of the Town of Andover, a team from the Institute for Human Centered Design (IHCD) joined members of the Town administration from Planning, Water and Public Works Departments, as well as staff and appointed members of the Conservation Commission. Central to the day was the participation of a group of Andover residents ranging from nine (9) to ninety-four (94) with a mix of physical, sensory and cognitive functional limitations. This group served as “user/experts” whose lived experience with a functional limitation built expertise about issues in navigating the environment.

The Town’s goal is to improve the design of the current path to be more welcoming and usable by all Town residents, a model inclusive trail for Andover. IHCD committed to assist for the dual purpose of reviewing basic accessibility issues based on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards and the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB) state code, 521CMR and for improved usability and inclusive design based on data derived from the comments and observation of the user/experts. Observing the user/experts, the group walked the route of the portion of the trail proposed for renovation to assess what works and what needs attention in order to inform the redesign.

**Overview:**

Haggetts Pond, which is located between Route 495 and Route 93, serves as the reservoir for the Town of Andover, MA. The Andover Rail Trail is located along the west border of the Pond. The only accessible entrance to the trail is located on Haggetts Pond Road, southwest of the Pond. A small informal parking lot is located right in front of the trail entrance.

The user/experts, town officials, and the IHCD staff team, walked along the trail which had beautiful views of the pond for about half a mile until stopping at an off-trail area that could afford a picnicking and viewing spot and then walked back to the trail entrance. The terrain itself was mostly good in terms of soil stability and there were not significant changes in slope along the path.



(The red line indicated the path taken on the review of the Rail Trail)

### **Issues and Recommendations:**

#### Parking & Drop-Off

*Compliance* – The viability of making Haggetts Pond Rail Trail an inclusive trail for the Town of Andover will need to tackle the parking situation. There appears to be only informal parking now. If parking is created, it will need to comply – and should exceed baseline compliance given intended use – the requirements for accessible parking required by ADA and MAAB.

Haggetts Pond Road is a narrow and winding street through a residential neighborhood. It is feasible to park several cars at the entry to the rail trail and options on nearby streets. But the parking is unmarked and requires pulling in and backing out. There is no current accessible parking. This is beyond the scope of this brief report but options for safer parking should be explored, perhaps a curved drive with one way in and one way out.

In addition, there is no current drop-off area that is a safe, level area from which to enter the rail trail. This would be a desirable amenity for an Inclusive trail and would benefit from a bench for waiting.

### Arrival Wayside

There are no compliance standards for waysides but the wayside would be considered a “program” of the Town and should be accessible. That would require attention to an accessible approach to the wayside, to the height of the wayside and the information within it and to the design of that information.



Existing wayside.



36 x 48 upright orientation bulletin case, and brochure dispenser, City of Rocks National Reserve

This would be a great opportunity to create a map to indicate the location of the accessible entrances to the trail, the location of restrooms, location of benches, and also indicating the slopes of particular paths to warn people who may have trouble accessing those paths.

### Path of Travel

The path was well maintained along most of the trail, though there were some areas where branches, twigs or piles of leaves compromised the requirement for a ‘stable, firm, slip resistant’ surface. The path is currently maintained and trash receptacles emptied regularly but the schedule would likely need to be expanded if higher use and more diverse visitors are anticipated.

There is a limited area along the trail where the edge of the path drops steeply to the pond with no protection or barrier between the path and the water. To ensure safety, add a cane-detectable barrier, whether it be logs or large rocks or logs firmly lodged along that edge.



There is no indicator of the steep slope to the Pond in this one area.

### Dog Waste

There was little question that the most serious issue compromising the use of the trail is the entrenched habits of dog walkers leaving waste. Walk organizer Ellen Townson and her husband had done a thorough cleaning the day before the walk to ensure that the route would be viable for people with mobility and sight issues. At minimum, clear rules for dog waste should be included on the website and at the trail-head. Adequate dog waste systems with places for plastic bags would likely need to be expanded. Fines should be established if not in place now for dog walkers who do not pick up after their dogs. Consider the possibility of requiring leashes on this portion of the trail.

### Shared Path – Walkers and Cyclists

Cyclists may well use this path as part of a longer ride. Clear and consistent guidance on shared path use should be on the website, at the trail head (both ends) as well as along the route. Given the short route envisioned as an inclusive trail, it may warrant asking cyclists to defer at all times to pedestrians. At minimum, cyclists should be advised to keep to the left of pedestrians in either direction.

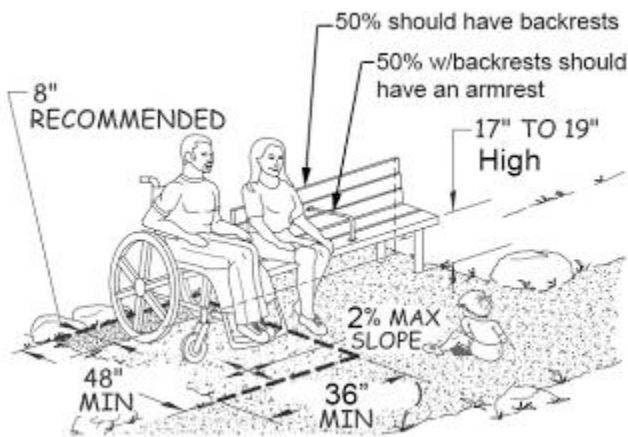
### Places to Sit

This is a significant determinant to welcoming many visitors. There were benches along the trail but too few were designed for easy use by anyone with a limitation. None were designed to make it

possible for a person using a wheelchair to sit adjacent to a bench or to transfer. A mix of benches, some with backs and arms, and individual seats could unobtrusively support more visitors with physical limitations from kids with mobility issues to older adults with mobility, strength and stamina issues. User/experts expressed frustration with the existing benches. A mix of issues compromised their usability including height that increased because of hollowing out of the ground below, flat uncomfortable surfaces and no backs or arms. Even well-placed rocks or logs can serve as informal seats especially for kids and those with stamina or breathing limitations.



Bench with no back support and eroding ground surface beneath.



This boulder is working well as a casual seat.

### Picnic Area

This would be newly created “program” of the Town and should be considered a primary destination for users of the trail. The area should also include access to the Pond for fishing as is allowed there for the public. Many of the attendees felt strongly that a good picnic area would be a major draw. The most significant factor will be to create an accessible route from the main path to the lower picnic and viewing area.

In addition to the natural steep slope of the land from the rail trail to this area, there were extensive tree routes. Locating an ideal approach and installing a sloped wooden walkway would mitigate the inevitability of the tree root problem recurring annually and make it clear that there is a path into the area. Note that there are already precedents on the other side of the trails for wooden walkways with railings. There are not fully accessible but do represent a precedent for a simple wooden structure in the same public space.



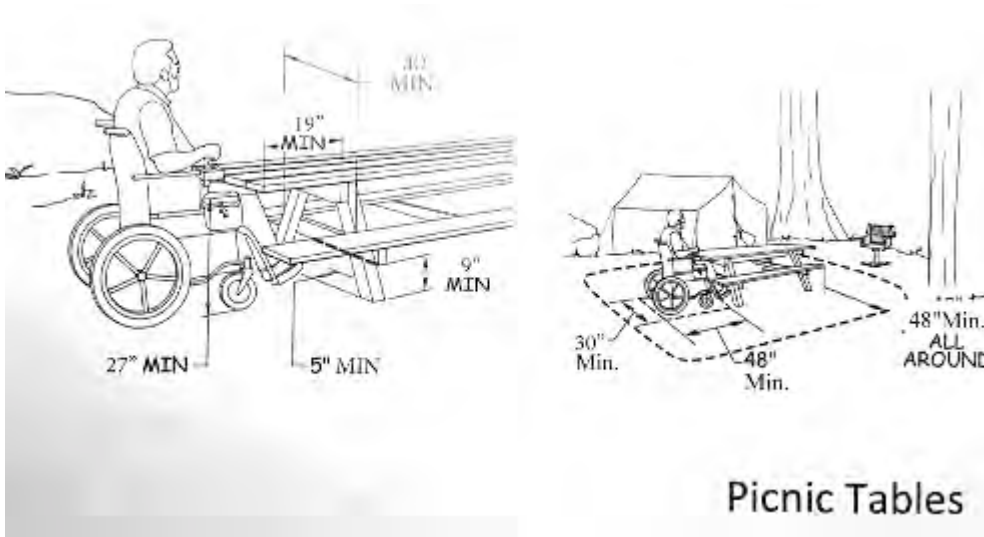
Viewing spot of the pond with one bench.



Slope with root intrusions on the route to the picnic area.

### Picnic Tables

This area would need a number of picnic tables accessible from a stable path of travel and accessible for people using wheelchairs. See drawing detail:



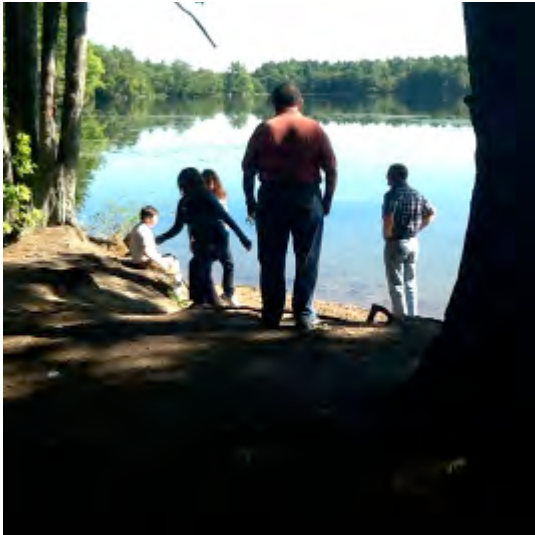
### Toilet

If the Town moves forward with creating a picnic area, it would be strongly encouraged to have an accessible composting toilet proximate to the site. It would be desirable, if possible, to have a spigot for washing hands even if not potable water.



## Fishing

Direct, accessible access to the Pond for fishing from the shore could be met here (see detailed guidance: <https://www.access-board.gov/attachments/article/590/fishing.pdf> )



View of pond at water's edge from proposed picnic area.



Viewing spot with the steep sloped path.



This bridge is on the opposite side of the trail heading into the woods and away from the Pond. It is not currently compliant but has small, correctable issues. Since it is already part of the visual vocabulary of the Pond, it is a model that should be considered for bridging the steep slope to the suggested picnic area and is easy to visualize as the basic outline of a fishing platform.