

Olentangy Trail UPDATES



THE CITY OF
COLUMBUS
ANDREW J. GINTHER, MAYOR

RECREATION AND PARKS
DEPARTMENT



Olentangy Trail Floodplain Comment Responses

Question 1: Please provide more information about the mitigation at Anheuser Park. Why is mitigation necessary there? What is being mitigated and why?

City Response: The addition of the pavement for the trail will increase the impervious area within the project limits. This increased impervious area will result in more stormwater runoff that must be mitigated through the use of retention or detention per City of Columbus stormwater requirements. Per the requirements, retention/detention basins cannot be constructed within the 100-year floodplain, which nearly all of the project lies within. This requires the stormwater mitigation to be done off-site, which is permitted if the project is within the same drainage area. The existing stormwater basin constructed to the east of the Bill McDonald Athletic Complex building falls within the same drainage area (HUC-12), and will be enlarged and have the existing outlet pipe and structure replaced to increase the storage capacity of the basin. This was determined to be the only feasible option for meeting the City of Columbus stormwater requirements.

Question 2: Where will the floodplain mitigation and added retention occur and what is planned?

City Response: The floodplain mitigation will be in the form of compensatory cuts that will offset the additional fill required within the floodplain to construct the project. These cuts will occur underneath the boardwalk areas adjacent to the new Northmoor bridge and in the grassed area near the Northmoor Park parking lot. These areas were selected because they required no tree removals and minimized impacts to vegetation. The added retention that is required because of the increase in impervious area related to the construction of the trail will occur at Anheuser Busch Sports Park and will consist of enlarging the existing stormwater basin and replacing the outlet structure and pipe to increase the storage volume of the basin.

Question 3: Why was Anheuser Busch Sports Park chosen as a floodplain mitigation site? Isn't it too far from the impacted areas?

City Response: The modification to the existing basin is required for stormwater mitigation, and it is not related to the floodplain or flood elevations. The additional pavement constructed for the trail will increase the impervious area and will result in more stormwater runoff. This runoff must be mitigated through the use of detention or retention per City of Columbus stormwater requirements. Per the requirements, retention/detention basins cannot be constructed within the 100-year floodplain, which nearly all of the project lies within. This requires the stormwater mitigation to be done off-site, which is permitted if the project is within the same drainage area. The existing basin at the Anheuser Busch Sports Park was selected because it falls within the same drainage area (HUC-12) of the project, and it could be modified easily to meet the stormwater requirements of the project. The original staging area for the construction of the basin is still in place, which will keep impacts to Anheuser Busch park to a minimum.

Question 4: Hasn't Anheuser Park been restored with native plantings and is providing excellent pollinator habitat? Dredging and expanding the basin would be a setback to this restoration project.

City Response: In 2021, native trees were planted in various locations around the basin. A native seed mix was also sowed. As part of this project, Columbus Recreation and Parks Department will visit the site prior to start of construction and assess the potential disturbance to these planting areas. After construction of the basin expansion, the project will restore the disturbed area by planting additional native trees and native seed mix (Ohio Prairie Nursery) throughout the area.

Question 5: Have any biota surveys been made of Anheuser Park and the floodplain at Northmoor Park to see what species each support? Any mitigation should involve protection or restoration of a similar area, that would increase area habitat diversity, rather than damaging already restored habitat that is not performing the equivalent stormwater function.

City Response: No biota surveys have been completed at Anheuser Busch Sports Park or along the floodplain at Northmoor Park. These types of surveys were not required as part of the National Environmental Policy Act documentation. However, mussel surveys and any live mussels present will be relocated prior to any in-stream work. A post construction planting along disturbed floodplain areas will include site conditions at Anheuser Busch Sports Park will be restored to current conditions after construction activities.

Question 6: How many in-water bridge support piers will be constructed? What is their impact to water flow, tree snags and recreational water travelers?

City Response: Both river crossings being constructed as part of the project will be single-span bridges that will not require any piers constructed within the river. The bridge abutments are being set back far enough to be outside of the floodway and should not accumulate debris.

Question 7: Has coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers occurred in regards to their flood releases and the elevations of such releases?

City Response: Yes, coordination with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is included in this project, and flood releases will be coordinated with the construction of the bridges and trail.

Question 8: Will there be any downstream impacts as a result of this project related to flooding?

City Response: A full hydraulic analysis of the river upstream and downstream of the project area has been completed using HEC-RAS, which is the modeling software used on all river/stream impacting projects. It was determined that the project will result in no rise of the 100-year flood elevation.

Question 9: The floodplain contains mature native trees and wetland areas in the vicinity of this project, and the river's riparian zone is an important wildlife feeding, breeding, nesting and travel area that has already been narrowed and constrained by urban development. When the environmental study is complete, please post it along with any necessary permit applications (404, 401, etc.), and notify the public.

City Response: The approved environmental document and waterway permits will be posted on the project website.

Question 10: How many acres of 100-year floodplain will be impacted for this recreational project?

City Response: A total of 1.89 acres of the 100-year floodplain is impacted by the construction of this project.

Question 11: Can the project return to the design phase to minimize floodplain impacts?

City Response: The alignment and vertical profile of the trail was designed to keep the project footprint and tree impacts to an absolute minimum. Nearly the entire project falls within the floodplain so eliminating floodplain impacts is not feasible, but the use of raised boardwalks and retaining walls are being implemented to protect trees, eliminate fill within the floodplain and minimize the grading limits required.

Question 12: Will the temporary gravel path at Northmoor Park be above the current elevation of the existing trail since that area often has standing water due to flooding issues?

City Response: The temporary gravel path will be adjacent to the existing trail at the same elevation. This temporary path will only be in use for two weeks or less.

Question 13: Will a no-rise be completed and permitted to make sure the fill in the floodplain will not increase flood waters for adjacent homes/properties?

City Response: A full hydraulic analysis of the river upstream and downstream of the project area has been completed using HEC-RAS, which is the modeling software used on all river/stream impacting projects. It was determined that the project will result in no rise of the 100-year flood elevation. Compensatory cuts are being completed within the project area to offset the additional fill in the floodplain, resulting in a net zero amount of additional fill.

Question 14: Building within the floodplain for a project that does not meet its stated purpose is wasteful, illegal and a misuse of our communities natural resources.

City Response: The project meets its purpose to improve safety and access for pedestrians and bicyclists who use the Olentangy Trail by creating a dedicated trail between Northmoor and Clinton-Como parks, and it will improve connections for residents, commercial centers and jobs. The design of the project complies with regulations governing floodplain construction.

Question 15: Will any temporary in-water gravel type weir be installed for construction equipment travel? If so, what's that impact and corridor restoration plans? Columbus has dismal record with inadequate repairing such waterway and water banks' damages caused by previous trail bridge projects.

City Response: Temporary access fill will be required within the river for the construction of both bridges. The plans will specify that the contractor will be responsible for returning the riverbed to the pre-construction condition when the construction of the project is complete.

Question 16: Provide inventory of all trees (quantity, sizes, species) that will be removed in order to build the project. Such will adversely impact (decrease) water and air quality - increase soil erosion, produce added sediment pollution, and add water run-off. Will Columbus Recreation and Parks comply with standing Mayor's Executive Order re: Tree Protection, to replace those? Please provide tree mitigation plan and replacement formula- (quantity, sizes, species) and where these new plants will be located.

City Response: A total of 64 trees will be removed for the construction of the project, and the size and species of each tree being removed is shown in the construction plans. Details for the exact location for the replacement trees will be in the landscaping details within the construction plans and are still being finalized. A total of 80 trees will be planted to offset the 64 that are being removed. This exceeds the requirements of City of Columbus Executive Order 2015-01, which provides a required mitigation ratio. All new trees will be a 3" caliper, but coordination of the species of the trees is still underway with the department's Forestry section.

Question 17: How is the City addressing reducing tree canopy in a city with a canopy deficiency? We lag behind other cities of our size in tree canopy, and the city has released a forestry plan to address this deficiency.

City Response: The project will adhere to the City of Columbus Executive Order 2015-01 states that all trees removed shall be replaced. This project will require the removal of 64 trees to construct the new trail, and using the required mitigation ratio, they will be replaced with a total of 80 trees.

Question 18: Adding the two bridges will create a new safety hazard for new planned Broadway crosswalk at SR 315 ramp-OhioHealth headquarters. That is not being addressed with selected alternative.

City Response: Please see the previous comments and responses related to the proposed crossing at North Broadway and the measures being taken to ensure the safety of the trail users at this intersection.

*** Only responses to comments regarding impacts to the Olentangy River floodplain are included in this response form. Comments pertaining to other components of the project area provided in other response documentation.*