

A Preliminary Neighborhood Plan and Vision for the Enhanced Access and Preservation of Cambridge Woods



***"When we see land as a community to which we belong,
we may begin to use it with love and respect." ~Aldo Leopold***

Submitted By:



March-May 2005

Introduction:

This preliminary plan serves as a foundation for the development of a formalized plan for the area known as Cambridge Woods. This preliminary plan was drafted by members of the Cambridge Woods Neighborhood Association and is the result of meetings, electronic survey, and discussions of residents of Cambridge Woods Neighborhood.

The intentions of the neighborhood with regards to Cambridge Woods is the goal of providing improved access for trails and woods between Cambridge Avenue and the Milwaukee River make the greenway area adjacent to the neighborhood while preserving and enhancing the integrity of the environmental corridor adjacent to the neighborhood.

Objectives for achieving this goal could include:

- Providing a formal access to a degraded bluff west of Cambridge Avenue at the intersection with Hampshire Avenue, in addition to improved linkages at other intersecting points.
- Creating appropriate access points to the natural area west of the Oak Leaf Trail.
- Providing limited access to open spaces and the Milwaukee River with little or no disturbance of existing plant and animal habitats.
- Restoring natural habitats.
- Involving residents in the planning, maintenance, and evaluation of the project.
- Creating opportunities to educate the public on the significance of the woods and river.

Background:

Cambridge Woods located on the Eastside of Milwaukee consists of an approximately eleven acre section of a contiguous primary environmental corridor along the east bank of the Milwaukee River. The boundary of Cambridge Woods runs from approximately Locust Street or Riverside Park on the south to the Village of Shorewood's Hubbard Park on the north. The Cambridge Avenue Woods as designated in the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission's **A Natural Areas and Critical Species Habitat Protection and Management Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin** as land under protective ownership with a recommendation that protective ownership be maintained for critical species habitat. Protective ownership falls under the jurisdiction of Milwaukee County.

The Milwaukee County's Oak Leaf Trail runs east of the 'Woods' along an abandoned railroad section. The trail is a popular and heavily used multi-use bike and pedestrian trail. West of the Oak Leaf Trail are foot paths through the woods down to and along the river.

Historical Perspective:

This section of the river has a strong historical access and use of the river. People used to come to the river for family picnics, swimming, and boating, and ice skating. When the railroad was active, access to the river was assisted by pedestrian limestone tunnels and staircases. The riverbank once included some homes and buildings. Prior to modern refrigeration, ice companies would cut ice on the frozen river and store it in 'ice houses' along the river. Remnants of some of these facilities are still visible today.



Abandoned Pedestrian Tunnel



Gerritt Sinclair, *Along River*, 1947

Current Condition and Use:

The Oak Leaf Trail is a heavily used trail for multiple uses including recreational and commuting bicyclists, pedestrians including people in wheelchairs, with roller blades, and cross country skiers. There is a wooded bluff along the entire length of Cambridge Avenue between the Oak Leaf Trail and the roadway. The Oak Leaf Trail from Cambridge Avenue has one at-grade paved access point on the northern end of the neighborhood at the intersection of Providence and Cambridge Avenues where both streets curve into one another. The only sidewalk leading to the access point terminates at an adjoining apartment building driveway. Moving north to south there are several footpaths from the roadway down to the trail. These footpaths vary in width and elevation. The most popular paths are located where east-west streets (Newport-Hartford-Hampshire-Kenwood-Linnwood) meet Cambridge Avenue.



Oak Leaf Trail

Relationship to Surrounding Area:

The Oak Leaf Trail has an at grade access point at the north end of the neighborhood at Providence Avenue. The nearest other paved access point is located beyond the very busy arterial Locust Street in Riverside Park. The trail extends southward with an access point at North Avenue, a planned access at the UW-Milwaukee Kenilworth building between Farwell and Prospect Avenues, and continues on to the Milwaukee Art Museum and the Lakefront. The City of Milwaukee has a signed Bike Route east along Kenwood Boulevard towards UWM and south towards Locust Street. There is currently bike lanes east of Oakland Avenue and along Locust Street. In addition, the City plans to stripe bike lanes along Oakland Avenue linking to the bike lanes at North Avenue. A missing link in the connectivity of the above facilities is an access point near the intersection of Cambridge Avenue and Kenwood Boulevard.

There are natural paths that meander through the natural woods areas, run along the river and connect with Hubbard Park located in Shorewood on the north and Riverside Park on the south. These trails have been heavily used in the past by mountain bikes, but have tapered off somewhat in recent times. An eroded ravine has served as a mountain bike ramp and jumping facility. In the past, this has not served as a welcoming feature to the woods and has caused some destruction to the trails and woods. The area to the south of this contains some cyclone fencing around the property of Hubbard Park. The purpose of this fencing is unclear other than to prevent people and bikes from entering the park. The fencing contains holes and other access points and is of little use with the exception of public protection from the current service tunnels.



Fence between Cambridge Woods & Hubbard Park



Eroded Ravine used for mountain biking jumps

Further to the south and beyond Riverside Park, there are plans to create a hiking path made of crushed gravel linking Riverside Park and Caesars Park south of North Avenue. Although the path is intended primarily for pedestrian use, it could attract further use of bikes in the woods, causing erosion problems to the trails. Trails along the river are more suited to be left in a natural state.

According to the soon to be updated State Comprehensive Outdoor Report Plan (SCORP), the following activities will indicate participation percentages of 34%-paved bicycling, 41%-bird viewing, and 65%-day hiking. These activities fall in the upper two tiers of activities. This is in relationship to mountain biking which will drop to the bottom third activity tier with 18% for single track and 20% for dirt road biking activity. Mountain

biking participation has seeing a decline in participation in more recent years. This trend is expected to continue with a less active youth and aging of population. Investment in hiking, birding facilities and supporting activities appears to be a much wiser use of public money.

Neighborhood Involvement

The neighborhood abutting the woods is represented by the Cambridge Woods Neighborhood Association, which formed in 2001. For the past two years, residents participated in a River Clean Up effort along the trail and woods. This past spring, residents conducted a focused pulling of the invasive garlic mustard plant and replanted the area with native Trillium plants. The neighborhood association was also successful in receiving a grant to pay for residential downspout disconnects, rain barrels and partial contribution towards development of rain gardens and a green roof, all in an effort to reduce the amount of stormwater run off into the combined sewer-water system. Recently, neighborhood residents stopped vandals in the act of cutting trees and removing river bank soil to build mountain bike jumps, thus preventing any further damage.

Neighborhood Vision and Recommendations

There are two main points of emphasis in this preliminary draft plan. The first is improving access from the neighborhood from the street to the Oak Leaf Trail and the other is the enhancement of natural area. The most logical points of improving access are where the east-west streets align with Cambridge Woods. These points include Linnwood, Kenwood, Hampshire, and Newport Avenues moving south to north. Both the Linnwood and Kenilworth links present some issues with elevation. Alternatives could include staircases made of natural hiking steps (i.e. limestone slabs or timbers).



The 'Boathouse'



Eroded access point at Hampshire and Cambridge

The access point at Hampshire Avenue presents the most logical main point of entrance. This is the most popular, worn and eroded site, that in its present condition is unsafe with jugged concrete, tree roots, etc. The elevation at this location is more manageable and could potentially be served by a ramp. If a ramp is not feasible, steps with a bike gutter could be an alternative. There are two public facilities at this location operated by the Metropolitan Milwaukee Sewage District (sewer switching facility) and the City of Milwaukee (water main facility). The Hampshire and Cambridge location is the focal point of the neighborhood at street level with the 'boat house' and historical location of the pedestrian tunnel mentioned earlier, and near a good access point to the woods. A primary access

point to the woods lies just north of this point could be enhanced through use of a kiosk, park bench, marker, or combination of elements. In addition, trail markings could be placed through out the main trail identifying historic and natural features. Another consideration could be a bank or native plant restoration section near the river bank.

Moving north again along the road is Newport Avenue, which presents some elevation problems and is also a popular access point. Between Newport and Providence Avenues there is no sidewalks on either side of the street and there is fencing of different types, most likely put up by adjoining residents to restrict cutting through routes. There exists a pretty sophisticated path that could remain with a more uniform park style fencing extended along the roadway.

Each of the access points mentioned could be more opened through the removal of invasive plants, buckthorn, etc. and landscaped, using native plants to bring attention to the entrances. Coordination with the City on making guardrails and signage stand out at these points and along Cambridge Avenue should be undertaken. Other man-made paths from the road should be discouraged through placement of boulders or similar natural obstruction. Any facilities that encourage destructive misuse of the woods should be avoided since they may have associated spillover impacts. In addition, the City could also assist with this project by marking crosswalks to trailheads. A raised crosswalk or similar calming measure would complement other existing traffic calming elements in the neighborhood.

According to the 2000 census for an area in the Cambridge Woods neighborhood, approximately 86,000 people live within a two mile radius, which contributes greatly to the substantial use of the trail. Improving safe and appropriate linkages to the trail and woods will benefit the general public beyond the borders of the neighborhood. The goal of whatever is done along the Cambridge Woods should remain to enhance the trails and woods while preserving the integrity of the corridor.



<p>Potential Funding Resources for Implementation: Coastal Management Program Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) Program National Park Service- Community Trails River Protection management Recreational Trails Program Stewardship Program Transportation Enhancement (TE) Urban Non-Point Source and Storm Water Grant Urban Forestry Program Urban Rivers Program Wisconsin Environmental Education Board</p>
<p>Comments and questions may be directed to: Peter McMullen, President Cambridge Woods Neighborhood Association at 962-6834 or petermcmullen@msn.com</p>

Appendix A

CWNA Comments on Improving Access to Cambridge Woods and the Oak Leaf Trail- Summer 2004

- I think a ramp for bikes is the best way to go...at least for my family, then we can easily bike the trail.
- One or more of the access points should be a ramp instead of stairs so people can get their bikes down easily and, of course, for the handicapped.
- We use the Hampshire/Cambridge access to the bike trail at least once a day and would appreciate an attractive rustic stairway and ramp also for bikes, wheelchair access with natural landscaping. Also adequate lighting and traffic visibility. Lots of children use this point. How about a water fountain too?
- I use the bike trail for dog walking, biking and walking. I agree w/ adding access points (a ramp seems most convenient for older adults and those like me until recently who used strollers for our children.) However, one downside to a sloping ramp could be that it becomes a bike/skateboard jump which could endanger trail users (although stairs could also have this effect, I guess). Although I worry about security concerns for the neighborhood, this would actually make the trail feel a bit safer, less secluded. One other access area I'd advocate for is right near the Locust Street Bridge, where the new condos are being built. It would be nice to be able to come up after passing under the bridge, as I (and maybe others) could then use the trail for avoiding crossing Locust on foot at the unmarked intersection.
- I live on Cambridge Ave in the 3200 block. Not only would I love to see a safer and more appealing entrance to the bike trail at Hampshire but would also like to see native plants at intersections. I have all native plants in my garden. As long as you are asking for feedback...I would also like to see speed bumps all along Cambridge. Cars drive between the "traffic-calmers" like bats out of hell. I would hate to see someone or a pet hurt and the roundabouts simply don't calm drivers down.
- The suggested access points to the bike trail in the email are all acceptable to me. Great idea!
- My wife and I have lived in 3300 block of Newhall for 19 years. We think a narrow ramp from Cambridge Ave. to the bike path would be the least invasive yet still allow easier foot and bike access. That's what we favor
- I just want it to be safe!
- I think it would be great to have those streets paths looking better and up dated. I am open to more sand, stone or wood that would be great.

Appendix B
Comment on Draft Cambridge Woods Plan
April 2005

In addition to the one written comment below, several verbal comments were received that were all positive to the Draft report. The Draft plan was also featured in the May Issue of the *Riverwest Currents*.

- I would also strongly lobby for closing the bike hill immediately behind (3400 block of Cambridge) as it is a source of noise, fireworks, brush fire and, last summer, ambulance calls. Both Shorewood and Milwaukee police patrol this stretch of the path but the number of small inattentive kids cutting through the woods to Cambridge is an accident waiting to happen. It is also environmentally a waste land and an eyesore. I agree with the idea of speed bumps on Cambridge. They could be the vinyl removable type for winter snow plowing. Asphalt ones would deteriorate quickly and be as much of an eyesore as the traffic circles. I would also like to see my block clean up the path border as the city is less than attentive and it's closer to us than the 3300 block. I treat it as something of a protected but public garden and removed a great deal of trash from there as well as move the numerous city lilies so that they can grow and be seen. There are some unsightly old fences in there too that I would like removed. Thanks again for your efforts in preserving our unique spot.