

## **Westfield Recreation Commission Brightwood Park Bicycle Trails FAQs**

### **Why bicycle trails in Brightwood?**

The plan for bicycle trails in Brightwood Park is part of a larger, town-wide initiative recommended by the new Town Master Plan and its Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Plan, and the new Parks Master Plan, both of which recommend multiple improvements/enhancements to improve bicycle safety and encourage bicycle use by more residents. This plan recommends expanded bicycling options (bike lanes and trails) for both on-road and off-road use, promoting safer bicycle opportunities for transportation, exercise, and recreation.

In the resident surveys conducted for the Master Plans (Town and Parks), multi-use trails and off-road bicycle trails were frequently requested amenities. As a result of this demand and the low cost to implement, the Master Plan consultants recommended bicycle trails for Brightwood Park along with additional multi-use trails in both Memorial Park and Tamaques Park.

### **Who is JORBA (Jersey Off Road Bicycling Association) and why are they involved in the plan for bicycle trails in Brightwood?**

JORBA is a statewide non-profit founded in 1999. Their mission statement is:

- Protect and promote the rights and responsibilities of cyclists as equal members of the trail user community.
- Organize volunteer work groups for conservation, development and maintenance of trails.
- Educate bicyclists in the safe and responsible use of off road bicycling.
- Promote the appreciation of and care for public lands.
- Educate concerning appropriate off road bicycle access to public lands.
- Assist in the formation and affiliation of new and existing local bicycle groups.
- Link all affiliated local and regional groups with similar purposes.
- Perform research relating to mountain biking.
- Act as a liaison between and among public land users and land managers.
- Be a partner for open space conservancy and for recreational trails management.
- Be a resource for parks and recreational land management.

JORBA provides trail building and trail maintenance services at over 30 parks around the state. The parks serviced by JORBA include Town Parks, County Parks, State Parks, Reservations, Nature Preserves, and Wildlife Management Areas. Although JORBA is statewide, each of its parks are monitored and maintained by a LOCAL chapter, with residents/members leading the cleanup, maintenance, and building of trails under the direction of the local land manager. In the case of Brightwood, the local Union County JORBA Chapter (led by two Westfield residents and one Cranford resident) would work under the leadership of the Westfield DPW to build, maintain, and clean the trails and surrounds in Brightwood. The Union County JORBA Chapter is offering these services free-of-charge to the Town of Westfield.

### **Will motorized vehicles be allowed on this trail (motorcycles, ATVs)?**

No. This trail is for human-powered bicycles, walkers, hikers, and runners only.

### **What safety measures would be in place to prevent collisions between bicycles and pedestrians?**

Collisions between bicycles and pedestrians on multi-use trails are extremely rare. In any case, the proposed bike trails in Brightwood would be completely independent of the existing gravel trail currently surrounding the pond. On the new bike trail (which can also be utilized by hikers/walkers/runners), the "rules of the trail" are universal: bikes yield to pedestrians. The trail will also be designed to eliminate blind spots and ensure ample visibility, so bikes have time to slow down or stop to avoid walkers.

### **Why can't you ride mountain bikes elsewhere? Why Brightwood?**

There are other legal bike trails in NJ, but most are a 30-minute or more drive from Westfield. These trails are intended to provide a convenient local option, especially for the youth of Westfield, who cannot drive to the other parks.

### **What is the anticipated increase in traffic and parking from the new bike trail?**

As this proposed trail is relatively small and in a local park with an overwhelmingly local appeal, most bike riders would be riding their bikes to the park, not driving. We do not anticipate an appreciable difference in parking/traffic. In addition, riders

would arrive at various times in the day, each likely staying only for 20-60 minutes, so it is unlikely the park would see substantial increase in crowding.

**Would you expect that there will be more adults than children mountain biking in the park?**

The intention of this proposed trail is to motivate all ages and especially families to come out and enjoy the park. With the recent renewed interest in cycling due to the pandemic, we anticipate a very diverse cross-section of Westfield residents using the trail and volunteering to clean and maintain the trail.

**Will you be cutting down trees to build this trail?**

No. No live trees will be cut down. The trail will follow a natural route around all healthy trees. Only dead, fallen trees and branches will be cut or moved to accommodate the new trail.

**Is this trail only for bicycles?**

No. The trail would be built with bicycles in mind, but could also be shared and enjoyed by hikers, walkers, birdwatchers, or trail runners.

**How long is this trail?**

The exact length would be determined when the final layout is confirmed, but we estimate between 1-2 miles.

**Will this trail intersect with the existing gravel pathway around the pond?**

No, the route of the trail would be limited to the area outside the perimeter of the gravel trail that runs around the pond. Once the proposed trail is complete, bicycles would no longer be permitted on the gravel trail, and would only be permitted on the bike trail.

**What is the trail made of?**

The trail is a natural surface trail. No stones, gravel, pavement, or other surface materials are needed or added to create the trail.

**How wide is the trail?**

The "tread" of the trail will be about 2-3 feet wide. A corridor slightly wider will be cut (trimmed branches where necessary) and maintained to keep the pathway clear.

**Who will be maintaining the proposed trail?**

As mentioned above, oversight of trail maintenance is the responsibility of Westfield DPW. The JORBA Union County Chapter has offered its resources/services free to Westfield to lead and execute trail building and ongoing trail maintenance and cleanup days at Brightwood. JORBA has already communicated with the advisors/members of the Roosevelt, Edison, and WHS Mountain Bike clubs along with the newly formed Westfield NICA (National Interscholastic Cycling Association) Team to encourage the club members to participate in trail maintenance and cleanup events. The students would always be supervised by the Westfield DPW along with the experienced, insured, team leaders of JORBA.

**Do bicycles have a greater impact on the trails and ecosystems than hikers?**

There have been several scientific studies performed around the country (and the world) to determine if different user groups (hikers, runners, horses, bicycles) have different impacts on trail conditions and the local ecosystems. The overwhelming conclusion is that the hikers and bicycles have very similar impact, while horses have a much greater impact on trail conditions due to their weight and the impact of hooves. These studies also concluded a far greater influence on trail condition and health of the ecosystem is how the trails are initially built (the slope and soil suitability of specific routes), and whether these trails are regularly maintained.

The trails in Brightwood would be built according to IMBA Standards (International Mountain Bike Association). These are the exact standards used by the US National Forest Service to build and maintain their off-road trail systems. These IMBA guidelines result in trails with minimal environmental impact (erosion) and avoid sensitive areas (wetlands, etc.). Active maintenance by the trail crew ensures the area surrounding the trails can be kept in a healthy, natural state.

**What is the current environmental health of the woods in Brightwood Park, and how will the new trails impact the health of the park?**

Simply put, Brightwood park is sick. Much of the park is overrun with invasive plant species, which run rampant in the park due primarily to the impact of the deer population. Deer droppings often contain invasive seeds, which germinate and grow rapidly. Exacerbating this problem, deer tend to eat the young, low-lying native plants, creating a lack of healthy native-species growth and giving more "real estate" for invasive species to take over.

In addition, Brightwood Park has been used as a dumping ground for waste over the years. The woods contain garbage, including old furniture, appliances, construction waste, landscaping waste, broken glass, and more. Part of the scope of the trail-building will be to remove as much of this waste as possible, and to perform regularly scheduled cleanups to ensure the woods and trail areas remain litter-free and natural.

Removing the existing "rogue" trails and replacing them with sustainable (non-eroding) trails will help reduce the spread of invasive species. Invasive seeds often spread via transporting soils during heavy rains. If trails are designed to minimize soil transport (proper slope angles and other design factors), the spread of invasive seeds is reduced. A properly designed trail also helps prevent the spread of invasive species as the trail acts as a natural "break" in continuity for invasive species to grow. This is not unlike the fire roads that are cut in wilderness to prevent fires from spreading. In addition, the extra manpower provided by the trail maintenance crew provides much-needed resources to continually attack and reduce the dominance of invasive species in the park.

To completely return Brightwood Park to its "natural state", eliminating invasive species and allowing native trees, flora, and fauna to thrive, would require a substantial investment of financial and human resources to drastically reduce the deer population, eradicate invasive species, and clean compromised soil conditions. It would also likely require fencing in sections of the park making them unavailable even to walkers. Recently some efforts to cut back on invasive species growth have been undertaken, but much greater manpower would be required to keep the invasive species at bay and allow native plants/trees to thrive. As mentioned above, the implementation of a properly built/maintained bicycle trail in Brightwood would not hinder Brightwood Park's ability to "heal", but rather improve its chances of doing so.

# WF Parks Master Plan Layout

Figure 8.4: Brightwood Park Concept Plan



## Jorba Bicycle Trail Proposal



### **Highlights of JORBA Proposed Layout:**

1. Avoids wetlands zones per Brightwood Park Stewardship Plan.
2. Eliminates intersection of existing gravel pathway with new bike trail. Bicycle trail and walking trails would be completely independent.
3. Provides separate trailhead entrance/exit on both the Prospect Street lot and the secondary entrance on Fanwood Ave.
4. Optimizes available terrain, topography, and soil condition for sustainable trails (minimal erosion).

### **Basic Steps/Timeline for Implementation of JORBA Trail**

1. Flag potential trail path for review of stakeholders. (1-2 days).
2. Modify trail path if necessary based on stakeholder input (1-2 days).
3. Secure permission from WF Parks/Council/Engineering to begin construction.
4. Organize JORBA volunteer workforce for construction:
  - a) Trailbuilding team will be led by experienced adult trail crew members.
  - b) All JORBA trail-crew members are insured and leaders are certified/insured for use of mechanized equipment if necessary (chainsaws for fallen limbs, mini-excavator). All volunteers would sign liability waiver form.
  - c) JORBA will provide all trailbuilding tools and train volunteers on safe use of tools. Volunteers will only use non-mechanized equipment (rakes, shovels, etc.)
  - d) Estimated time to complete trail-build **3-4 weeks**, weather permitting.
  - e) Ongoing trail maintenance will be led by JORBA in collaboration with WHS/Roosevelt/Edison Mountain Bike Clubs and the WF Area NICA Team (National Interscholastic Cycling Association).