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Planning Commission of the City of Schenectady  
City Hall  
105 Jay Street  
Schenectady, New York 12305

October 18, 2017

Re: City of Schenectady Bike Infrastructure Master Plan

Dear Planning Commission:

This letter contains my Comments on tonight's Agenda item concerning Bike Schenectady, and the request that the Commission make a recommendation to the City Council for the adoption of the City of Schenectady Bike Infrastructure Master Plan (hereafter "Bike Schenectady Plan").

SUMMARY: The Planning Commission should recommend that the City Council approve the Bike Schenectady Plan as part of the City's Master Plan, but should do so with the inclusion, as anticipated in Code §264-131, of certain "conditions, changes or requirements that may serve to further the purposes" of the relevant City Code chapters.

More specifically, I suggest the following changes or additions be made or requested by the Commission to the Bike Schenectady Plan:

1. Pedestrians. A passage or section that details the broad variety of people and activities that come under the rubric of "pedestrians", and the importance of fully considering the many existing uses of a stretch of the proposed bike network, and the impact on current users and uses, before designing or constructing any form of multi-use or shared-use path, or other segments of the bike network that impact significantly on pedestrian activities.
2. Riverside Park. *Option A*. An explicit statement, with detailed explanation, concluding that Riverside Park is not an appropriate location for a shared-use (multi-use) path, due to its physical characteristics, longstanding uses and users, and its historical significance. Or *Option B*. [as a pale substitute for Option A.] a statement that the characteristics of the Park, and concerns of current users, strongly suggest that an objective study of the pros and cons of having a shared-use path in Riverside Park be undertaken, including evaluation of on-road alternatives to conversion of the sole walkway in Riverside Park into a shared-use path.

## PEDESTRIANS

The Bike Schenectady Plan has, as expected, significant discussion and depiction of the various types and range of Bicyclists. (see, e.g., D-1, D-5). But, although it mentions pedestrians and "other users", there is not one sentence describing the vastly complex array of pedestrians and their activities. That discussion should be necessary even when carving a shared-use trail out of an unused portion of land, but it is crucial when recommending that pedestrian trails or walkways in parks a century old be subjected to conversion to a different and potentially disruptive use.

In a section on Greenways and Shared-Use Paths, a Federal Highway Administration [lesson book](#) points out that: "19.3 Shared-use paths are typically used by a diverse set of users representing different travel modes, using different types of equipment and traveling at different speeds. It is important to understand, even within the basic user categories of bicyclists, pedestrians, and skaters, how diverse path users can be." The text goes on to explain:

*Pedestrians include joggers, runners, and people walking dogs and pushing strollers, as well as disabled people. Today, disabled and injured people have a wide variety of assistive devices available to aid in travel or enable participation in trail activities....*

*In addition to diverse users and a variety of equipment used, shared-use paths serve a wide variety of trip purposes. User behavior, such as travel speed and willingness to make stops, varies considerably with different trip purposes. Especially in urban and suburban areas, paths are routinely used for commuting to work or school, running errands, visiting friends, getting exercise, observing nature, and seeking recreation and enjoyment of the outdoors.*

*Moreover, people of all ages and abilities use and enjoy shared-use paths—from the very young to the very old, from the novice cyclist to the marathon trainer. Accommodating and balancing the various needs created by this diverse user market is a central challenge for today's shared-use path planners and designers.*

The professionals and advocates who put together Bike Schenectady almost certainly know the above factors. But, I believe a City's Comprehensive Plan needs to demonstrate that knowledge, so that the public can be assured that the interests of all significantly affected groups have been fully considered when drawing up recommendations.

## RIVERSIDE PARK

As written, the Final version of the Bike Schenectady Plan declares that Riverside Park is *already* part of an existing Off-Road Network [Map 1] called the Riverside Trail that connects to the Mohawk Hudson Bike Hike Trail, and that should be connected in Phase I to a Railroad Bridge section and Mohawk Harbor Trail, completing a significant shared-use path. [4-4] Various Maps show Riverside Park as an existing and future part of this off-road network. There are several problems with this situation; failure to address

them is likely, I believe, to have a very negative effect on Riverside Park and its users.

First, I have not been able to locate any official designation of Riverside Park as part of the City's off-road bike network, and many of us in the Stockade were surprised to hear about this designation. Planning and Engineering staffers pointed me to the 2000 Bicycle Plan, but it only speaks of proposed, long-range and theoretical inclusion of the Park in the off-road network.

One reason for not designating Riverside Park to be part of the City's Off-Road Bike Network is the fact acknowledged by Bike Schenectady (on D-11) that, "The current codes for the City of Schenectady prohibit bicycle use of paths and trails within the parks in the City". [a compilation screenshot of the relevant code sections is attached].

Perhaps more important, from a safety and "comfort/enjoyment" and common sense perspective: There is no way to meet the guidelines endorsed by Bike Schenectady and required by NYS DOT, without removing the two grandest existing stands of shade trees in the Park. (see Trees collage below) The AASHTO Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities (4th Ed., 2012), [Chapter 5: Design of Shared Use Paths](#) states:

#### *5.2.1 Width and Clearance*

The minimum paved width for a two-directional shared use path is 10 ft (3.0 m). . . . . *Wider pathways, 11 to 14 ft (3.4 to 4.2 m) are recommended in locations that are anticipated to serve a high percentage of pedestrians (30 percent or more of the total pathway volume) and higher user volumes (more than 300 total users in the peak hour).* [emphasis added]

There is no doubt that for the foreseeable future far more than 30% of the users of Riverside Park's path will be pedestrians. The Riverside Park path is only ten feet wide, and has no buffers on either side, much less the required 2-foot, graded buffers, and 3-foot clearance from trees, signs, benches, etc. There is no justification to cut down those magnificent trees, when an on-road bike network is so readily available.

Most important from the standpoint of Riverside Park many and diverse current users, we believe that a shared-use path would become a "scared-use path," and run many young and old, and in between, and their dogs, out of the Park. Please see the attached collage showing the many kinds of current uses and asking if they can safely co-exist with a shared-use path.

As the Australian walking advocates group [Victoria Walks](#) has noted, after decades of experience on miles and miles of shared-use paths in the Melbourne area:

*"Victoria Walks has significant reservations regarding shared paths and how they impact walking, particularly by more vulnerable walkers. Generally, slow moving recreational cyclists may be able to share paths with walkers. However, walkers do not generally mix well with commuter or sports cyclists, who typically travel at higher speed." [and]*

*"Road managers should avoid converting footpaths to shared paths, as they may be 'designing out' the most vulnerable road users – older walkers and those with a disability."*

Taking Riverside Park out of the bike-network now, by removing it from Bike Schenectady would make for a more "planful" and efficient approach to the City's bike infrastructure. To not condition your recommendation would leave current users and uses at the mercy of a process which is highly likely to merely ask if engineering criteria are being met. That is no way to treat a Park that is loved for its beauty and relative tranquility.

Don't just take my word. Don Rittner, former City Historian and County Historian, wrote, in a report prepared in 2007 for the City Planning Department concerning a proposed Bike Trail segment, that "Riverside Park is valued as a unique component of the Stockade Historic District offering residents and visitors a relatively tranquil place to enjoy a magnificent view of the Mohawk River from the walking path and park benches." In addition:

- On January 26, 1998, a Resolution of the Schenectady City Council resolved, that Riverside Park "is recognized as a unique component of the [Stockade Historic] District and best serves residents and visitors as a quiet place to view the natural beauty of the Mohawk River." In addition, the Resolution stated that "to change its special nature would deprive visitors and disadvantage the homeowners who are the caretakers in this Historic District of national importance."
- Indeed, with its combination of urban waterfront beauty and relative tranquility, Riverside Park was praised by the editor of Architect Forum as "probably the finest thing of its kind in America." (Dec. 1961)

We believe the current version of Bike Schenectady needs to be supplemented in some way to better articulate the types and needs of pedestrians and the likely inappropriateness of imposing a shared-use path on Riverside Park. These issues are dealt with comprehensively, with many images (including the attached collages) and links to relevant materials, at my website, "suns along the Mohawk." The relevant posting can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/RiversideBikes2>.

Sincere thanks for your time and attention to these issues.

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David A. Giacalone S/\_\_\_\_\_

p.s. A personal plea: I have heard members of the Commission suggest that Stockade residents are merely stingy and want to keep Riverside Park to themselves. I have never heard that sentiment in a couple of decades of fighting to preserve what is best about the Park, and often greet newcomers at the Park with enthusiasm and urging that they tell their friends. Here is a suggestion, for example, I have recently proposed:

Riverside Pedestrian Sanctuary: Riverside Park is treasured for its relative tranquility. Its pedestrian path could be known as a Sanctuary for Pedestrians, if

bicycles, skateboards, and inline-skaters were banned, as they are on the Jay St. Pedestrian Walkway. People using canes or adult walkers, as well as those with baby strollers and children, and dog walkers, and the rest of us on foot, can be made welcome and safe by declaring it to be solely for the use of pedestrians (and statutory pedestrians, such as those in wheelchairs and similar devices). The lack of significant inclines also makes it more accessible to those with walkers and wheelchairs than many other city parks. Both ends of our age demographics would be and feel much safer.

Chapter 186: PARKS AND RECREATION

Article I: General Use and Conduct

☐ § 186-1 **Applicability of provisions.**  
[Amended 1-14-1985 by Ord. No. 85-07]

This article shall be construed as applying and being in force in all the parks of the City and all the streets in and through said parks and all parkways and bicycle paths of the City.

Chapter 186: PARKS AND RECREATION

Schenectady Municipal Code

Article I: General Use and Conduct

☐ § 186-3 **Motorized vehicles; snowmobiles; bicycles.** *Bikes in Parks \**  
[Amended 1-14-1985 by Ord. No. 85-07]

- \* A. Motorized vehicles and bicycles shall be restricted to specifically designated areas and subject to all applicable vehicle, traffic and penal laws, statutes and ordinances.
- B. Snowmobiles are prohibited in all of the areas set forth in this article.
- \* C. Bicycle riding within the parks will only be allowed on the driveways, and the riders shall not go more than two abreast and shall keep to the right side of the roadway; nor shall they ride at a speed in excess of 15 miles an hour.
- D. No person shall drive a motorized vehicle within the limits of Central Park at a speed in excess of 15 miles per hour except upon Fehr Avenue and upon Golf Road where the speed limit shall be 30 miles per hour.  
[Added 5-4-1987 by Ord. No. 87-41]

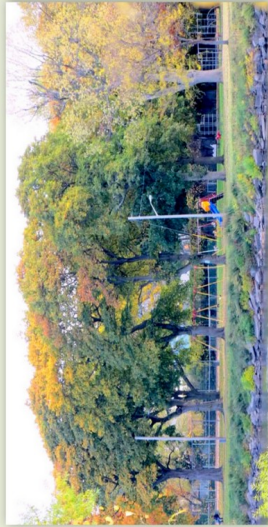
Chapter 248: VEHICLES AND TRAFFIC

Article III: General Operation of Vehicles

☐ § 248-23 **Driving on sidewalks; bicycles.** *Bikes on Sidewalks, Footpaths*

- A. No person shall ride, drive or operate any device on any public sidewalk or footpath intended for the use of pedestrians, except at a properly constructed driveway. This section shall not apply to children 10 years of age or under nor to handicapped persons.<sup>[1]</sup>  
[1]: Editor's Note: Amended at time of adoption of Code (see Ch. 1, General Provisions, Art. I).
- B. Bicycle riding is, however, permitted on designated portions of sections of City sidewalks consisting of ramps, overpasses and tunnels which were constructed to provide access across Interstate Route No. 890 and the 890 interchange at the south end of Erie Boulevard and Edison Avenue.

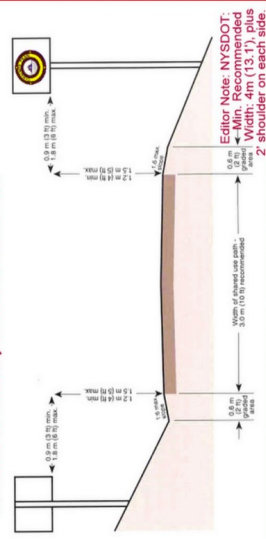
## a shared-use path in Riverside Park?



above: east end trees seen from the Mohawk River

below: Cross-section figure of Shared Use Path from the 2000 Schdy Urban Bike Master Plan . . .

Figure 4. Shared Use Path on Separated Right of Way, from 2000 Schenectady Urban Bike Master Plan



Above: Minimum Requirements: 10-ft width; 2-ft graded shoulders; 3-ft clearance for signs, trees, etc.

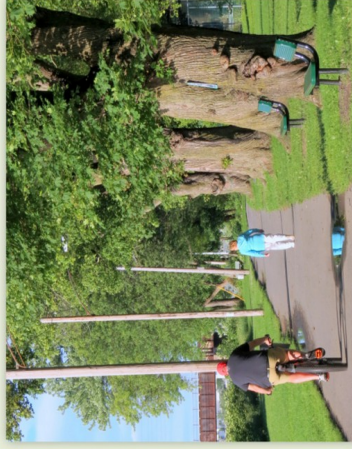


photos by david giacalone

## TREASURED TREES AT-RISK

The current AASHTO guidelines, followed by NYS DOT, call for shared-use paths wider than 10' when 30% of the users are pedestrians. But, even with the 10-ft minimum, the required 2-ft wide graded shoulders on each side would mean removing two rows of the grandest trees in the Park. The photos in this collage show the size and beauty of those trees, which add much more than shade and color to the Riverside Park experience.

below: trees along the south side of path



above: utility poles along north side of path



above: trees & poles along north side of path



above: shrubs, curbs and bricks at the Esplanade would also need to be removed to add shoulders



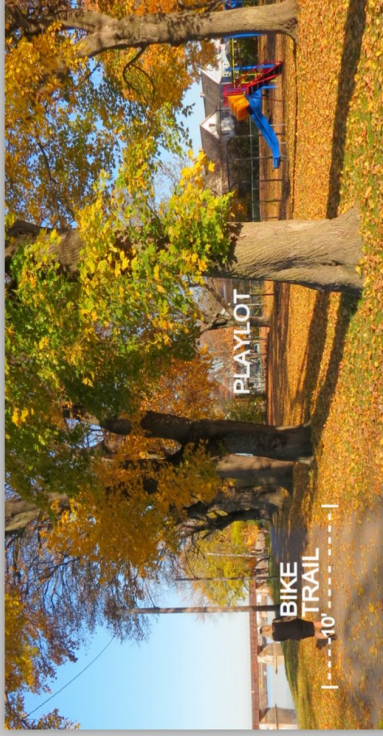
for more information see: [tinyurl.com/RiversideBikes2](http://tinyurl.com/RiversideBikes2)

Can a two-way bike-ped trail through Riverside Park co-exist safely with current uses?



?

It is the only path or trail in this narrow, 6-acre Park, which is often praised for its slow pace & tranquility



- Fog often obscures vision.
- Trees & poles make adding required buffers impossible..

The path is a long, narrow "town square".

The trail is within 10 yards of a Kiddie Play Lot, with no physical barrier.



runners of all types use the path

- a place to watch sunsets & see friends -



As the only hard surface, it is used for baby strollers, hopscotch, puddle-jumping, elders with walkers, wheelchairs, and more..



It is a traditional path for dog-walking.



Venders and re-enactors line the trail during special events.

The trail serves all ages and abilities.



The west entry/exit is at a blind intersection with Washington Avenue