

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 includes bicycle facilities (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 among the highest requested amenities. As a result of this strong demand, 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 more significant 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 are full of 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 like fire

roads cut in wilderness to prevent fire 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. 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.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ADDED SEPTEMBER 14, 2020:

Why did the Parks plan commission include a JORBA rep but none from a nature oriented not for profit like Nature Conservancy?

There was not a JORBA rep on the Strategic Parks Plan steering committee. There is a footnote in the Strategic Parks Plan that references JORBA as a stakeholder, but being a stakeholder means that JORBA was consulted and asked to help design the trails in Memorial, Tamaques and Brightwood after the surveys showed walking and bike paths as an area of interest. There were 17 stakeholder groups consulted by the steering committee and Brandstetter Carroll (the consultant) to develop the Strategic Parks Plan.

What does the process look like from here?

In short, no decisions have been made and there are no imminent changes to Brightwood. The Strategic Parks Plan was ratified by the Town Council on February 11, 2020. The overall plan involves a potential investment of more than \$ 41.6 million across all of the Town’s Parks and some Board of Education properties, so the steering committee, at the request of the Mayor, identified a list of priority items from the plan, asking them to take a balanced approach across the parks system and across the interests of residents.

At present, the Town of Westfield is doing due diligence on all of the priority projects. In Brightwood this means that the Town is further considering the environmental, safety, insurance and historical considerations surrounding this project, as well as collecting community input.

Specifically, the Town will be filing an application with the New Jersey DEP to request a Watershed Land Management pre-application meeting to assist the Town in requesting a Letter of Interpretation (LOI) and potential identification of any regulated areas (i.e. wetlands, buffer zones, mapped habitat, etc.). This request to the DEP is expected to be filed in September. It may take many months to hear back. In parallel, inquiries are being made with New Jersey Green Acres to see if there are approvals that are needed from them.

What are the insurance requirements that the Town will have to adhere to in order to safely allow biking on official multi-use paths in Brightwood?

The Town's Insurance Broker conducted an initial walk-through at Brightwood in mid-August and will advise the Town about whether this might increase our premiums or risks once a final design for the bike trails is known. The Insurance Broker will also consult with the Town's Joint Insurance Fund as it relates to recommended signage and other restrictions to increase the safety of all park-goers, if the bike trails move forward.

Can the path be altered from what was shown during the meetings?

Yes, depending on the feedback from the State and the results of related and ongoing due diligence efforts, the Town of Westfield as Land Manager would make the final decisions on the path of the trail through the park.

Where will people coming from out of town park their cars?

The parking lot at Brightwood has approximately 35 spots. We don't anticipate the parking lot being insufficient but there is public parking on the streets nearby for occasional overflow. Most of the park's visitors arrive by foot or by bike.

How will rules of etiquette be posted and enforced?

If we go forward with the bike path, signage will be purchased and posted at the park entry points, and reminders will be placed along the pathways. Similar to the recent positive campaign in Westfield to encourage wearing helmets when riding a bike ("Caught Wearing a Helmet"), the Council would be happy to initiate public awareness campaigns to remind all park-goers of the rules and etiquette that is expected.

What will be the cost to the Town of installing these paths?

Brandstetter Carroll, the consultant hired by the Town of Westfield to prepare the Strategic Parks Plan, notes in its final report that the bike paths in Brightwood were estimated to cost \$221K. JORBA proposed to cover the cost of installing the paths at the direction of the Town of Westfield, who as Land Manager would retain control over the park and make all decisions about path positioning and length and make all operating decisions as well.

How much clean up of invasives would JORBA be able to assist with?

JORBA and its corp of volunteers has offered to assist with the work the DPW and the Green Team have been pursuing to stave off the spread of the invasive species growing in the park, but certainly cannot “rid” the park of invasive species which have taken hold.

Is biking allowed in a passive park?

Brightwood is, according to Green Acres, a passive park and cycling is permitted activity in a passive park.

Has Green Acres approved of this plan?

Green Acres has been informed that the Town is looking into the possibility of installing bike trails in Brightwood and the Town will follow any procedures that Green Acres requires once the results of the NJDEP review are known.

In the town-wide master plan survey, Westfielders, by a majority of 8 to 1, desire walking and hiking trails over mountain bike trails. Why would we go to the trouble and expense of commissioning a survey, to then ignore the results?

The Strategic Parks Plan indicates that walking paths are the #2 most desired addition to the parks amenities in Westfield. The bike path envisioned for Brightwood Park is a multi-use trail to be used by cyclists and pedestrians. In addition, if the bike path is installed it will be established as a separate multi-use trail while the existing trail looping the pond would be reserved for pedestrians only.

What is the history of African American families living in the Park?

There was a recent article in the Westfield Leader detailing some of the history according to its reporters, but the Town of Westfield is looking further into the history as part of its due diligence.

If JORBA helps create a formal set of multi-use trails, do they have to then be advertised on JORBA’s and other websites as ‘mountain biking’ trails? Would the Town have any control over this?

The Town of Westfield as the Land Manager would have controls and would decide about how to publicize. The trail will be less than two miles and generally flat. The Council can propose that the Brightwood trails be called Beginner bike trails or novice bike trails to limit the interest of those who might be seeking new and more challenging places to ride and looking on sites of mountain biking advocates. The Town of Westfield as the Land Manager has 100% control over this park, including the ability to shut down any future bike paths if they are deemed unsafe for other park-goers or the environment.

WF Parks Master Plan Layout

Figure 8.4: Brightwood Park Concept Plan



Jorba Bicycle Trail Proposal

