

July 11, 2019

Mayor Meg Kelly
Commissioner of Finance, Michele Madigan
Commissioner of Accounts, John Franck
Commissioner of Public Safety, Peter Martin
Commissioner of Public Works, Skip Scirocco

**PRAISE FOR THE DOWNTOWN CONNECTOR, SARATOGA GREENBELT TRAIL
HOPE FOR A WATERWORKS PARK**

Dear Mayor and City Council Members,

We congratulate you and your staff for all of your excellent work in making the Downtown Connector of the Saratoga Greenbelt Trail a reality. This important trail segment will be a landmark feature of our downtown area, and a testament to our commitment to creating a more walkable, bikeable city.

The City of Saratoga Springs adopted the Urban and Community Forest Master Plan in 2013, recognizing the many values of trees, from their beauty, health benefits, and value for wildlife to their contributions as “green infrastructure,” storing carbon, reducing air and water pollution, and conserving energy. In that important policy document, the City committed to preserving and expanding the urban forest, including preserving existing mature trees, reclaiming and increasing growing space for trees, planting a variety of large-growing trees species, and integrating trees into all infrastructure planning and project development.

We are pleased that the urban forest has been a major consideration in the City’s planning for the Downtown Connector. We appreciate the Council’s efforts, along with those of Tina Carton and Steve Lashomb, who have worked with the project consultant to incorporate trees in decisions about the siting and design of the trail. We support the many proposed tree-friendly actions, which, we understand will include:

- Retaining existing trees wherever possible. In general, it is better to preserve a large tree than to remove it and replace it with a new one.
- Coordinating with the City Arborist, Steve Lashomb, to develop a planting plan that utilizes native species. We hope that the priority will be to plant native, large-growing species from the City’s approved list wherever overhead utility lines are not an issue.
- Budgeting for the purchase and planting of approximately 130 new trees.
- Providing adequate distance – ideally at least 6 feet – between the edge of the street and the trail or sidewalk to accommodate large-growing trees.
- Using structural soil under the trail or sidewalk to allow tree roots to grow without raising the pavement.



- Where the distance between the edge of the street and the trail or sidewalk is inadequate for large trees, and where there is room within the street right-of-way, planting trees on the far side of the sidewalk.

We know that, along some segments of the trail, there are obstacles to achieving ideal conditions for the growth of large trees. We were pleased to learn that the City is planning to expand the tree lawn to six feet to improve growing conditions for trees in High Rock Park. This widened tree lawn allows for the establishment of a magnificent row of large trees lining High Rock Avenue along the entire length of the park.

Now that the plans for the Downtown Connector are being realized, we would like to emphasize the value of a Waterworks Park as an integral feature of this important segment of the trail. Sustainable Saratoga has previously promoted the idea of creating Waterworks Park, a simple neighborhood park on City land encompassing the large open area between the City's water treatment plant and Excelsior Avenue. We based our proposal on a number of factors, including the rapid residential growth of the surrounding area, the need for more neighborhood parks as the City grows, and the call for creative place-making in the City's new comprehensive plan. The new Downtown Connector trail will pass this location and would provide a direct pedestrian and bicycle connection between the park and the downtown area. With minimal investment, and minimal interference with the secure operation of the plant, Waterworks Park would be a great asset for our city. We hope you will support it.

Again, thank you and your staff for your dedication to making the Downtown Connector a reality. We are encouraged by the prominent role of trees in this project and know that the trees planted along this important trail segment will only serve to increase the value of the trail to our downtown area. We also hope you will consider the potential benefits of establishing a Waterworks Park.

Sincerely,



Art Holmberg
Chair, Sustainable Saratoga

