

# Improving Access Along the Shawsheen River



A participatory research study  
by Elizabeth Maldari  
with Andover's Commission on Disabilities  
for the Shawsheen River Master Plan

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## Introduction

This portion of the Shawsheen River Master Plan uniquely highlights the desires of people with disabilities and their community for accessible river amenities. This document shows how *the Shawsheen River can be imagined as an inclusive space for people with different abilities to interact with each other and their landscape*. Research was gathered through input sessions, interviews, and site visits conducted specifically for people with disabilities, but also open to people without disabilities.

While the following pages serve to review the research process, detailed amenities will be integrated throughout the rest of the Shawsheen River Master plan to maintain the inclusive aspect of accessibility.

A key concept required by ADA compliance is that *public programs and services, when viewed in their entirety, must be accessible to people with disabilities, but not all facilities must necessarily be made accessible*.

A disability can be a temporary or permanent physical, behavioral, sensory, neurological, or cognitive inhibition.

People with disabilities may need support with mobility, cognition, hearing, vision, independent living, and self-care.





## Case Studies

Initial desktop research was done to look at possible solutions for ADA compliance and access on conservation land. Samples were categorized into three groups;

**I. Infrastructure** - An adjustment to the landscape such as pathways, playgrounds, fitness trails, and sensory gardens.



Will Rogers Gardens Proposed Sensory Garden

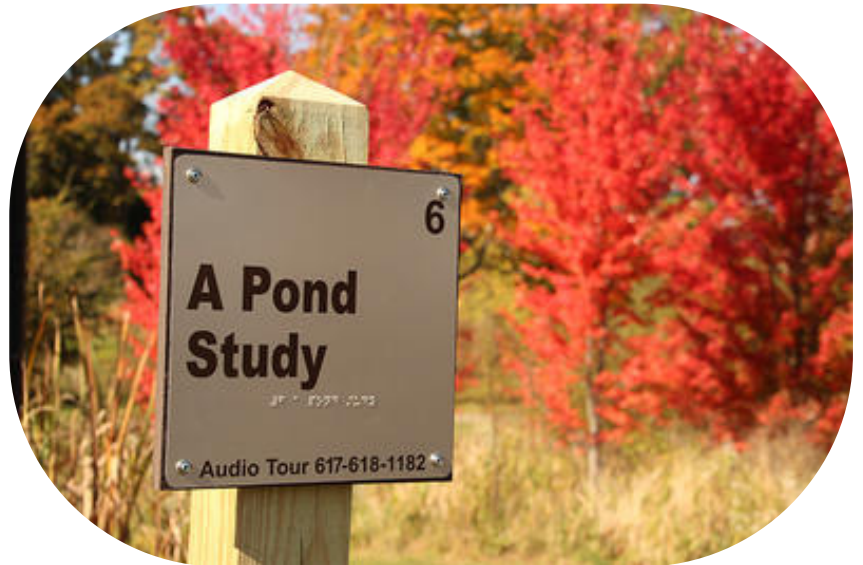




**2. Object** - Adaptive tools to support people with disabilities in accessing the outdoors. For example; an all-terrain wheelchair, sensory bag and interpretive signage.



**3. Activity** - Opportunities for interaction and community building. Examples in this category are inclusive hikes, guided tours for people who are blind or low-vision and a fishing group where vets experiencing PTSD are partnered with at-risk youth to fish.



## Round-Table Discussion

June 6, 2022

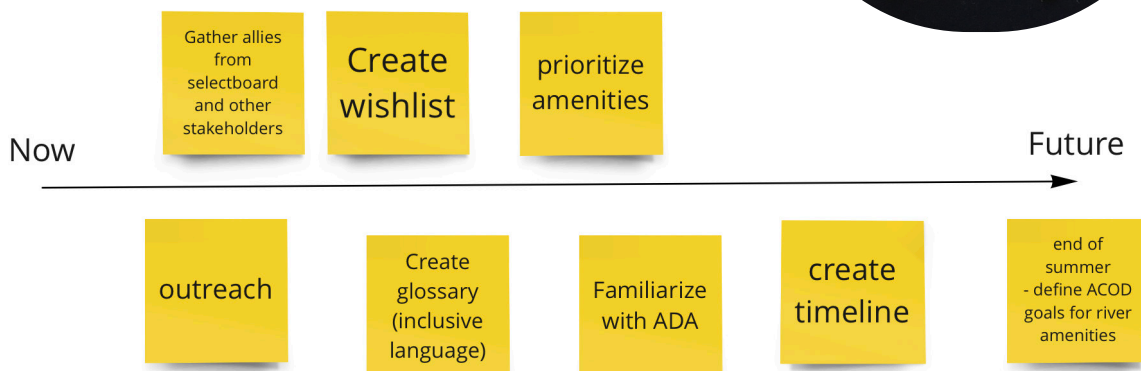
### Participants: 5

A hybrid discussion took place on June 6th with two Commission on Disabilities members joining in person at Memorial Hall Library and an additional 3 Commissioners on the ACOD or Conservation Commission joining through a Zoom call. Conservation Director, Bob Douglas gave a brief overview of upcoming conservation projects.



### Outcomes

- Commission members introduced themselves and voiced concerns.
- Generated a list of potential stakeholders.
- Set goals to identify and prioritize accessible amenities.





## 2016 Land Survey with IHCD

### Participants: 19

In 2016, members of the Conservation Division gathered with Andover residents with disabilities and the **Institute for Human Centered Design** to observe and make suggestions for accessibility along the Haggets Pond Rail Trail in Andover.

Reviewing the notes from this survey offered insight into the barriers to enjoying conservation land that people with disabilities experience.

### Note Review Outcomes

- Empathize with systemic safety concerns such as intentional dehydration.
- Identify community and educational components for inclusive planning.
- Explicit need for interpretive signage to label slope, terrain type, etc.









## Survey

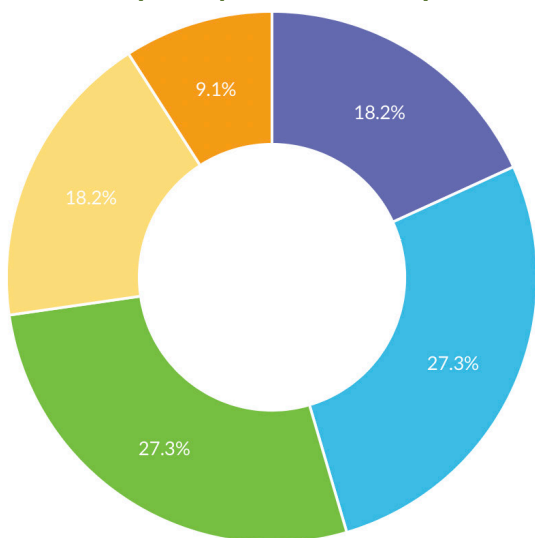
### Participants: 9

Shortly after the round-table discussion, an exploratory survey was shared with Andover's Commission on Disabilities. Not all questions were mandatory and therefore not all nine participants responded to every question. Likewise, the survey had a few questions where participants could select multiple answers.

### Outcomes

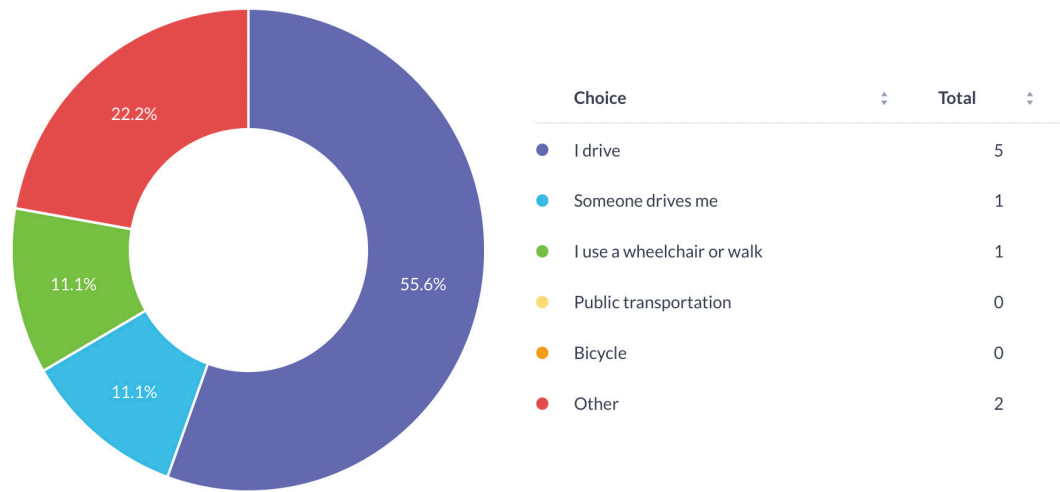
- Insight to shape desired experiences on conservation land.
- Amenity prioritizing and input.

*What is your preferred way to learn about activities in Andover?*

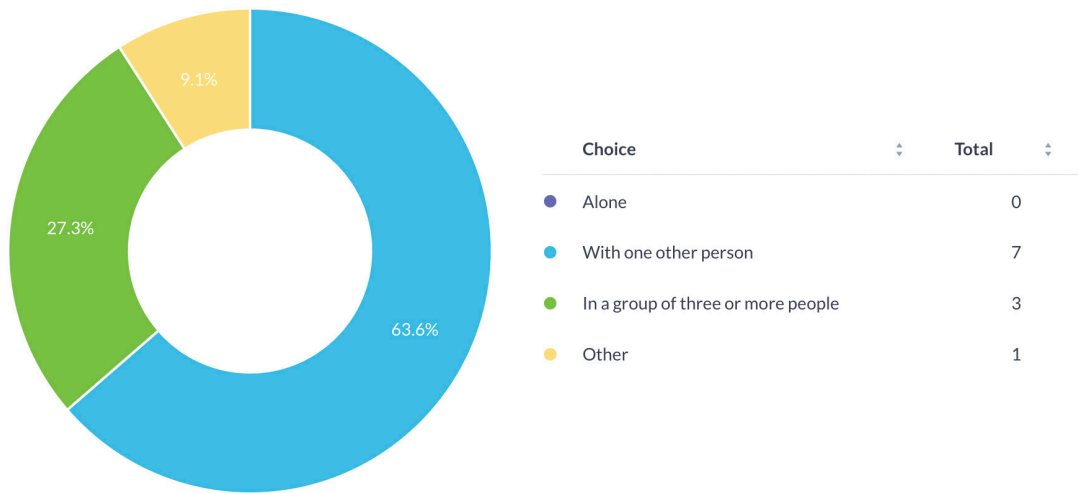


Choice	Total
Word of mouth	4
Community calendar	6
Website	6
Social Media	4
Other	2

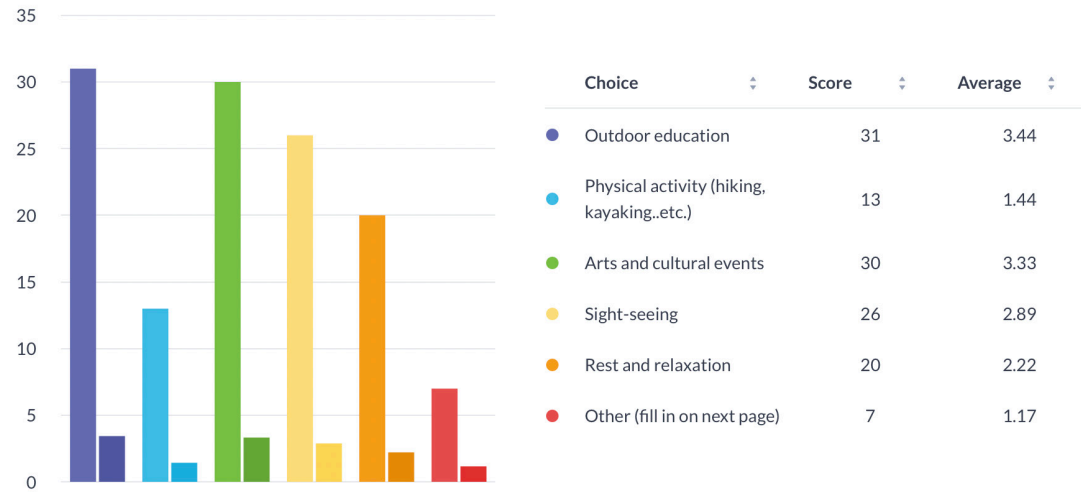
How do you typically arrive to events in Andover?



How would you like to visit conservation land?

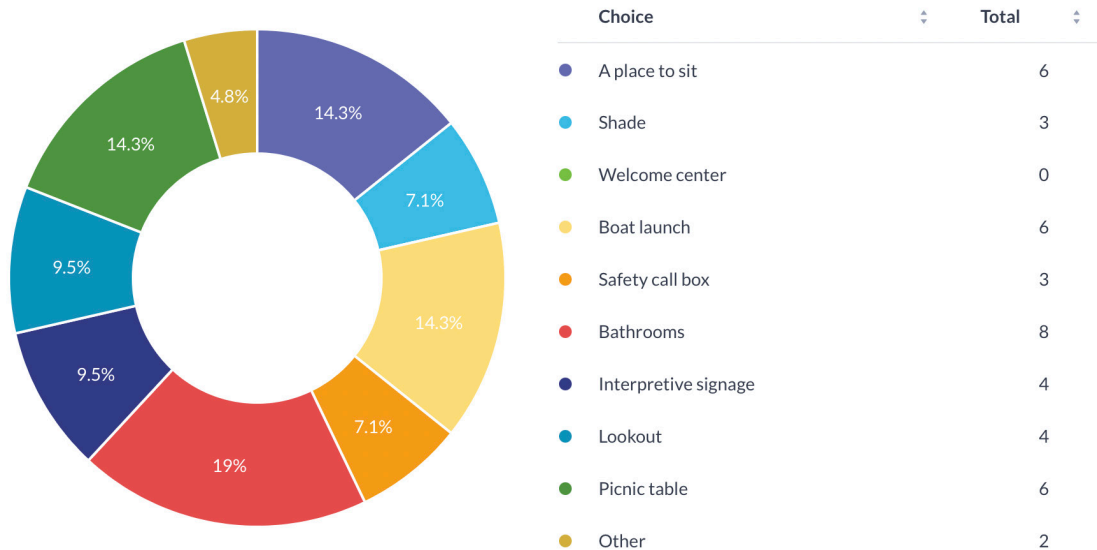


Please rank the activities you would most like to participate in on the Shawsheen if they were accessible.





*Other than ADA compliant parking and pathways, select up to 5 more accessible amenities that you would like on the Shawsheen\**



*If you marked “other” please identify some suggestions here.*

#### Answers

kayaking, canoeing, tubing/floating/rafting downstream

Social activities music art

I want it all!

I would love to have some paper boat races!

*Please add any additional comments or concerns in the box below.*

#### Answers

I feel it is important to create a solid financial plan for co developing ADA and Non ADA features in a parallel fashion that also meet regulations. They are not exclusive of each other.

## Participatory Research

Input in the Park pt. I  
July 16, 2022

Participants: 26

An input table was stationed in the park to engage passersby to vision an accessible park.

The Park was selected since it is a centralized outdoor space which attracts people with different abilities on a daily basis. Participants were invited to draw desirable amenities onto acrylic sheets placed over images of the Shawshen River. Members of the Andover Commission on Disabilities and other members of the Andover community with disabilities were invited to join the table and promote the issue of accessibility on conservation land as a shared public interest.



### Outcomes

- Andover youth view conservation land as a place for inclusive interaction and desire more opportunities for learning about native ecology.
- Senior hiking and kayaking groups need structural support for activities to be inclusive for all abilities; eg. ADA kayak launch for people with difficulty exiting typical kayak.
- Heard concerns of balance between ecological impact and accessible infrastructure.





## Input in the Park pt. 2

July 20, 2022

Participants: 15

This event was coordinated with Andover Division for Parks and Recreation to take place during 'Music in the Park'; a weekly, public event regularly attended by senior citizens and people with neuro-cognitive disabilities living in group homes.

Justin Coppola, chair on Andover Commission on Disabilities was present for the duration of the event. Children were eager to participate in the drawing activity, while adults shared their input by writing down comments on forms.

Researcher Elizabeth Maldari also did outreach during the music break to speak with people who were seated and couldn't come to the table, but wanted to share input about accessibility.

## Outcomes

- Listened to concerns over parking.
- Expanded support network to parents pushing strollers looking for better pathways on conservation land.
- Added new and repeat amenities for the master list.



## Interviews

### Participants: I I

Since a disability is a medical condition, it is unlawful to share identifying names and details of the people who were interviewed for their input without consent. Some disabilities impact memory loss, decision making and engaging in social activities, therefore acquiring consent is not always possible and therefore input from interviews will be shared as a summary rather than as individual statements.

Sometimes, a disability makes large gatherings uncomfortable, therefore the input sessions themselves were inaccessible, especially if they took place in an unfamiliar location. In order not to prioritize input from any one type of disability, efforts were made to take a person-centered approach, with individual interviews.



Discussions were not always contained to the river; they also broached a range of concerns. A word cloud was generated using common phrases and themes to highlight paths of thought and context.

### Conclusions

- Efforts should be put to raise awareness of the river and safe access points.
- Parking is a main reason someone with a disability or their caretaker may or may not visit conservation land.
- The restorative, peaceful aspect of the river appeals to many.
- Conservation Land is a place for interaction and community building between people with and without disabilities.







## Site Visits

**ADA Kayak Launch Possible Sites**  
May 3, 2022

**Participants: 12**

A group of stakeholders including members from the Select board, AVIS, ACOD, Facilities, Conservation and Planning departments joined to visit about 4 possible locations for an ADA compliant kayak launch. At each site, members discussed pros and cons of the sites.

Top choices were Nason's Landing off of River street and Shawsheen Pines.



### Outcome

- Nason's Landing off of River street was decided as the best location due to the fact that it had space for parking and the eventual addition for other ADA compliant amenities.





## Acton Arboretum August 27, 2022

### Participants: 5

A small group consisting mostly of ACOD members gathered at the Acton Arboretum to wander around the trails, take notes on the experience and evaluate the amenities.

Most of the attention was paid to path surfaces, placement of amenities and way-finding.

### Conclusions:

- Boardwalks and stone walkways were the most favorable surfaces over pavement, stone dust, and grass.
- Transitions between surfaces are often a tripping hazard.
- Way-finding signs should include distance and time in addition to name.
- Information for plant identification should not be flower-based.



Summary

	Community	Infrastructure	Education
Awareness	Website Dog Management	Transportation Signs	
Arrival	Necessities Library	Parking Poop-Bag Dispenser Safer Crosswalks	
Info/Safety		Trail Markings Emergency Call Box Maps Interpretive Signage	Nature Guide
Activities	Art Fairy Homes	Lookout ADA Trail Play Area Railings Kayak Launch Fishing	Bird Watching
Rest		Shade Composting Toilet Picnic Area Bathroom Food Trucks Benches	Discourage Dehydration
Departure	Sense of Belonging	Trash Cans	





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