



# Public Engagement & Outreach

## OVERVIEW

Public engagement is a tremendously important part of the planning process. Along with analyzing existing conditions, there is no better gauge for identifying potential challenges and opportunities than asking key stakeholders and residents for their input.

For this plan, an advisory committee was formed and under their guidance, Alta held a property owners meeting, multiple public community forums, and a branding and logo charrette, reached out to property owners abutting the trail, and administered a public survey. This outreach effort successfully enabled the project team to determine where the trail alignment was preferred, understand which property owners were the most receptive to the overall idea of the trail, and then explore potential branding and look of the Sullivan O&W Rail Trail.





## PUBLIC INPUT METHODS

### ADVISORY COMMITTEE

An advisory committee, composed of key stakeholders and County officials, was formed and brought together for a series of meetings and calls beginning in August of 2017. An inventory and analysis of existing conditions was assembled through field inventory, desktop analysis, and research. Using this information to start the conversation, the advisory committee helped inform the consultant team and guide the planning effort in the following key areas.



The Advisory Committee discusses the future of the Sullivan O&W Rail Trail



The Advisory Committee walks a portion of the undeveloped rail trail

**Safety** Roadway safety, especially crossings, were made a priority for the trail design.

**Nodes** The history of the area, which includes the railroad, hamlets, and other cultural resources, are great locations to be highlighted and incorporated into the development of the trail system for creating public interest and providing destination points for trail users.

**Health** The numerous health benefits that come with active transportation should be emphasized in the development and design of the trail.

**Users/Restrictions** In addition to traditional users (hikers, joggers, bicyclists) the trail has the potential to cater to unique users along its route such as ATV'ers, equestrians, or winter users such as cross-country skiers. Who will the trail serve?

**Maintenance** An inventory and evaluation of current maintenance resources and practices related to current trail conditions was developed along with a plan for future trail segment maintenance and improvements.

A shared vision emerged from the advisory committee, to make Sullivan O&W Rail Trail a comprehensive regional trail network that would not only be used for recreation, but also become a viable means of active transportation.



## KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Key stakeholders in this project include individuals who own land on, adjacent, or nearby the proposed trail. On November 29th, 2017 the project team met with 12 property owners to discuss the trail feasibility study. The consultant team successfully engaged the owners in attendance by giving them a first look at the proposed trail alignment, and then by listening to comments and concerns. The ideas gleaned from the owners and their associates were extremely beneficial towards the ongoing planning process. Valuable and important insights as well as potential obstacles were recognized that were not previously discovered during the project teams initial analysis. This meeting also initiated an open dialogue between “neighbors” of the trail and the project team. Not all land owners were available to attend the property owners meeting however, efforts to engage the remaining owners abutting the trail continued throughout the feasibility study.

Prior to this property owners meeting a letter was mailed out to owners along the potential trail route shortly after the 2017 July 4th holiday. The letter contained important information such as an overview of the trail project and contact information in case they wanted to learn more and express support or concern for the project.



The Steering Committee walks along Pearl Street in Livingston Manor

### COMMUNITY

Engaging the public (future trail users) could be the most beneficial part of the public engagement process. The people who live, work, or play in Sullivan County hold valuable insight into how existing portions of the trail currently function.

The first community meeting, held on January 30th 2018, was a success. It drew more than 90 people to the Sullivan County Legislative Hearing Room. It was here that the community was introduced to the project team and received an overview of

the project to date which included:

- Intended Outcomes**
- Potential Benefits of the Project**
- Anticipated Project Timeline**
- Map Reviews**
- Discussion on Alternative Alignment**
- Trail Branding**
- Design Guidelines**

the project team, while discussing maps, granted both parties the opportunity to learn about the future trail and discuss vital next steps in the project.



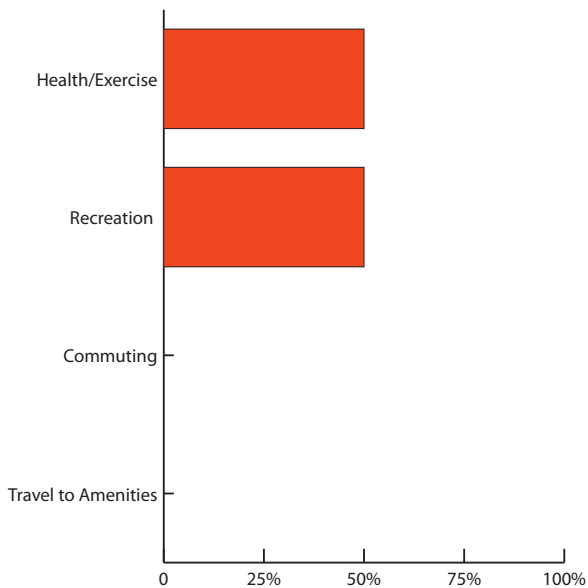
On January 30th, 2018, Alta Planning + Design, along with the advisory committee hosted a community meeting to share the progress on the project to date. Over 90 community members braved the cold to learn about the project's progress and ask questions.



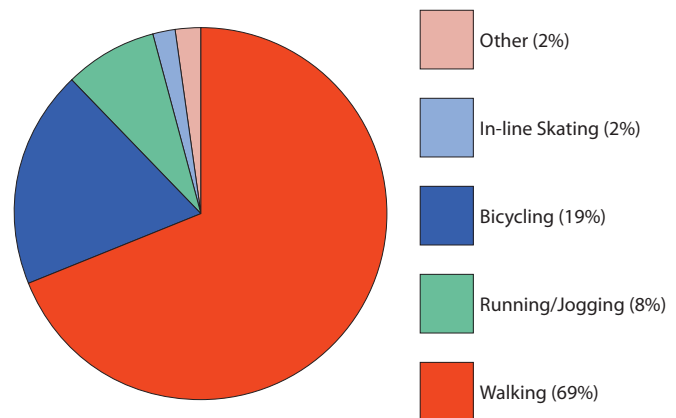
## PUBLIC SURVEY

An online survey was created to capture community and trail user input on current O&W trail use and visions of trail and network improvements. Promotional cards, containing links to the survey and website, were distributed at meetings and community events to encourage the community to participate. The survey resulted in 83 individual responses. As to be expected with any public opinion survey, results were varied but certain trends did develop as the results of the survey were tallied and analyzed. Participants were asked a series of questions (outlined on the following page) and asked to rank items based on the severity of the perceived issues. Issues such as behavior of trail users, conflicts with other trail activities, crowds, trail width and crime safety were of low concern to those surveyed. This is not to say some community members have legitimate concerns, but overall the survey suggests that other items were found to be of much more importance.

### User's Primary Purpose for Current Trail Use



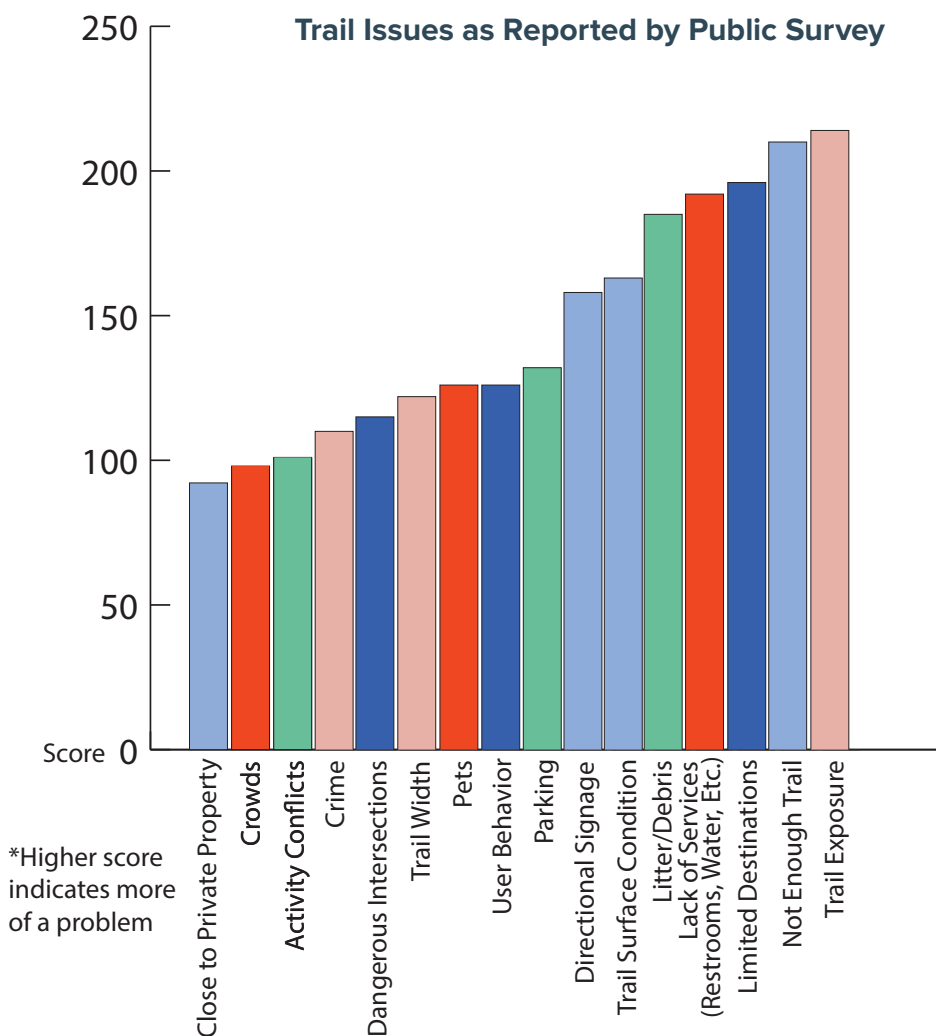
### Activities Engaged In While On Existing Trail



The information in the above charts was taken directly from the online public survey. These results provide a base understanding of the trail's primary uses in its current state.







#### RESULTS FROM THE PUBLIC SURVEY

The main concerns, which became apparent from the online survey, include trail exposure (not enough publicly available information about the trail), lack of trail, lack of destinations, and lack of services such as restrooms and water fountains. Other issues include trail user’s behavior, trash, trail surface condition, and signage. These concerns seem to closely align with the priorities set by the advisory committee and the observations made by the consultant team in the field.

Many of the priority items identified through the online survey are systematic improvements to the trail which are addressed in the proceeding chapters of this document. A comprehensive branding effort, which goes far beyond logo development, was conducted to establish a cohesive identity for both existing and proposed trail segments and connections. This branding effort includes marketing materials that will highlight historical and cultural hubs along the trail.

A public survey was also conducted to receive feedback on these branding efforts. Chapter 7 of this plan discusses the branding and marketing development and strategies that, when completed, will help address many of the top concerns raised in the survey including trail exposure, limited destinations, and signage.



## PUBLIC SURVEY

The table below outlines the questions posed to O&W users and community members of Sullivan County.

Questions	Responses					
Gender	Male	Female				
Age	15 or under	16-24	25-44	45-64	65 or over	
What Town/City do you live in	Open Ended Response					
What is your home zip code	Open Ended Response					
Which trail do you use most often?	Open Ended Response					
What mode of transportation do you typically use to access existing trail segments	Motor Vehicle	Bicycle	Run, jog, walk	Other, please specify		
Approximately how much time do you spend on the trail	Open Ended Response					
What activity do you engage in while on the trail	Walking	Running/Jogging	Bicycling	In-line Skating	Other	
What is your primary purpose for using the trail?	Recreation	Health/Exercise	Commute to school/work	Travel to other activities (e.g. shopping, visiting friends, etc.)		
Please estimate the number of days you use the trail during the past twelve months	Less than 5 days	5-10 days	11-25 days	26-50 days	51-100 days	Greater than 100 days
How would you rate your health status	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	
On a scale of 1-5, to what extent do you feel the following items are problems on the trail?	Not a problem					Major Problem
Too crowded	1	2	3	4	5	
Conflicts with other trail activities	1	2	3	4	5	
Behavior of trail users	1	2	3	4	5	
Trail surface condition	1	2	3	4	5	
Trail width	1	2	3	4	5	
Pets off leashes/animal waste	1	2	3	4	5	
Litter, glass and debris	1	2	3	4	5	
Dangerous road intersections	1	2	3	4	5	
Directional Signage	1	2	3	4	5	
Personal safety (crime)	1	2	3	4	5	
Lack of services (water, restrooms, etc)	1	2	3	4	5	
Parking and/or access	1	2	3	4	5	
Limited destinations	1	2	3	4	5	
Not enough trail built yet	1	2	3	4	5	
Not enough people know about this trail (trail exposure)	1	2	3	4	5	
The trail is too close to my property	1	2	3	4	5	







The project team discusses potential trail design and branding with the steering committee and stakeholders.

### BRANDING WORKSHOP

On March 15, 2018 Alta Planning + Design and Sullivan County officials invited the Steering Committee and members of the public to join together for a work session to develop the branding and logo for the Sullivan County O&W Rail Trail to emphasize and blend both the history and future of the trail. Branding the trail is important for marketing and outreach as well as navigating the trail once fully implemented. A discussion of the rationale and intended benefits of the project included economic development for local communities, regional tourism expansion, non-vehicular transportation options, and commuting alternatives for residents. General trail design criteria, such as pavement surface and modes of transportation were also reviewed.

In the case of the Sullivan O&W Rail Trail, it is also important to incorporate the unique personalities and branding of the sections that are currently developed.

More information on the branding process including specifics related to the design charrette on March 15th can be found in Chapter 7 of this document.



## OUTCOMES FROM THE PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS

The robust public engagement effort for the Sullivan County O&W Rail Trail has garnered great insight into the needs and desires of the community. It is clear that in its current state, the trail is primarily used for recreation and exercise. Most of the users enjoy running and walking the trail, but a significant portion (20% of people surveyed) use the trail for cycling. We anticipate as the trail sections are improved and various local hubs of interest are added, it is likely all trail users, especially cyclists as commuters, will increase the traffic on the trail.

The community supports the study and development of the trail but, understandably, has questions about how this may be accomplished. Some of the questions brought up at the public meeting include the financing of the trail expansion, continued maintenance to the existing and future parts of the trail, and relationships with landowners. These questions have been heard. Throughout the development of this plan, these points were in the forefront of the planning process. The methods and strategies for addressing these concerns are outlined through this plan.

In addition to bringing to light new concerns and opportunities, this public input process allowed the consultant team to prioritize improvements and expansion based on land ownership, funding, and demand. A prioritization matrix was also developed based on the various public input.



Stakeholders and Property Owners meet at the Hurleyville Makers Lab in November of 2017.