FOREST PRESERVE ADVISORY BOARD Report No. 2016-01
REPORT TO COUNCIL

SUBJECT: Trail condition and maintenance – North Preserve
DATE: January 21, 2016

BACKGROUND: Approximately 1680 feet from the intersection of Ridge Road and Northway[1], there is a major trailhead for trails in the north preserve. This is one of two trailheads for the north preserve located along Northway.

As is the case for all trails in the forest preserve, this trailhead, and the trail system it feeds, have formed over years of usage, and therefore has formalized into a major trailhead.

Due to the steepness of the trail extending from the trail head, and the heavy use, the trail has become very eroded and worn. Erosion is accelerated by the steep slope and channelization of water along the trail path during heavy rain events. This has created a gully with exposed tree roots and muddy areas.

ANALYSIS: The Forest Preserve Management and Maintenance Guidelines generally allows for the existing informal trail system, while recommending against formal maintenance of these trails. The guidelines do provide for exceptions, particularly in situations when trails pose a threat to the preserve or to the users.

The condition of this trail poses a threat to the natural condition of the preserve due to the extreme erosion. The steepness and unstable condition of the trail also poses a threat to users. It is the opinion of the Forest Preserve Advisory Board that there is greater harm associated with leaving the trail surface in its current condition; than there would be harm if modest trail maintenance is performed.

Recent inspection of the trail has caused city staff to conclude that erosion and further channelization of this trail will continue unless there is intervention.

The Management and Maintenance Guidelines allow for modifications to trails for the purpose of addressing surface drainage as follows:

- Alteration of existing surface drainage patterns should be considered only when runoff creates conditions considered to be unsafe to the public or damaging to the surrounding natural conditions.
- Should surface drainage patterns require modification, such modification will only employ natural materials.

[1] The trail head can be identified by a gravel apron extending to the edge of Northway.

- Grade dips or water bars may also be used to divert surface water flow from a trail.

The Public Works Department has previously addressed similar trail/path erosion at Buddy Attick Park through the installation of water bars which stabilize the trail, control water flow and minimize erosion.[2] A similar treatment could be installed along this trail, which would address the problem conditions in a manner consistent with the Forest Preserve Management and Maintenance Guidelines.

RECOMMENDATION: It is recommended that the City Council approve the installation of water bars along the length of the eroded trail off Northway in conformance with the policies and recommendations of the Forest Preserve Management and Maintenance Guidelines. It is further recommended that any materials used for this project be naturally sourced, preferably using wood from trees natural to the area.

ATTACHMENT: Erosion on referenced trail.

This report was approved by consent.

[2] Another example of the use of water bars to stabilize trails can be found on Plateau Place. This was done by GHI with the use of volunteers.