

Plans aired for final leg of greenway

Options for underground stretch include a raised wooden boardwalk

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NEW HAVEN — A unique portion of the Farmington Canal Greenway got a public airing this week as the city presented options for the final phase of the popular walking trail.

Dean Sakamoto Architects presented three options for the mainly underground section from Hillhouse Avenue to the intersection of Grove and Orange streets.

"Designing public spaces is

my passion," said Dean Sakamoto, a principal in the city firm, as he elaborated on the potential for the tunnel-like space through the Audubon Arts District to serve a museum function.

Sakamoto's contribution was part of a plan designed with Milone & MacBroom and Johnson Land Design that brings the former rail and canal line from Hillhouse Avenue to Long Wharf Pier, which is the last portion through New Haven.

A total of \$6.5 million in

mainly state and federal funds is available for the 1.9-mile section to Long Wharf, the most urban portion of the walking-biking trail that extends inland to Cheshire and eventually will connect to Northampton, Mass.

Sakamoto's design ranged from a simple bituminous surface through the underground portions to a hybrid raised and paved structure with interpretive signage to the most elaborate, which is a raised wooden boardwalk.

The wooden structure would allow the space to be used as an interpretive center explaining the history of the rail line and before that, the canal line, which played important roles in local economic development.

"It was the umbilical cord that connected the towns," said Sakamoto, who teaches at the Yale School of Architecture and is the curator for its art gallery.

The architect said he wants to make the area, which still contains pieces of the original rail line, into "a community space — almost a museum." He said the wooden framework "warms up the space, humanizes it."

For security reasons, this section, like all other city parks, would close at a certain time each night.

There have already been several robberies along the Newhallville portion.

When the trail emerges onto

Orange and Grove streets, it continues as a surface route on city streets down to Long Wharf, under the proposed plan.

Vincent McDermott, of Milone & MacBroom, said the surface options range from a simple "sharrow" lane for bicycles, which are painted symbols reminding motorists that bikers share the road, to a more expensive dedicated bike lane.

The route from Orange Street would wind down Grove Street to State Street to Chapel Street and Union Street, before turning onto Water Street, Brewery Street and Canal Dock Road.

An alternate route would bypass State Street for Olive Street, but the planners felt this was more problematic because Olive Street is narrow.

One other option that was popular with the dozen interested members of the public at the meeting was to take advantage of the off-road Vision Trail that winds off Water Street to Brewery Street.

The designers will work suggestions made by the public into the plan before presenting the final design at a later meeting.

Generally, the comments favored spending the available funds on a more complete tunnel design, rather than picking a cheaper version.

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Pictured above is the most complex proposal out of three for the below-grade segment of the Farmington Canal Greenway from Hillhouse Avenue to the intersection of Orange and Grove streets and features a raised boardwalk deck that would provide a view of the original 19th century rail line underneath.