

Please consider my comments below for the July 18th Park Board meeting regarding Birch Trail.

The Birch trail in question is a fun easy trail loop and an outstanding example of a shared trail that would be ideal for families with small children and beginning bikers to more easily learn how to bike in the woods and spend quality time together. Because of the steep terrain in Hlxon, there is a shortage of beginner trails like Birch, and an abundance of challenging trails that most families with small children must avoid, because they have not developed the skills to navigate steep trails. Opening Birch will create an ideal place for biking families and beginners to use.

We should also do all we can to lower potential conflict between bikers and hikers. Five years ago, I was riding my mountain bike up shared-use Vista trail and was confronted by a hiker who was so certain that mountain bikes were not allowed on Vista that he pushed me and my bike off the trail and down a somewhat steep ravine. I was unhurt and the hiker had run off before we could engage in a thoughtful discussion. I love the trail signage in Hlxon, but it is not always easy to understand which trails are designated for which activities. This is especially true for visitors to our area.

Of all the trails that have the opportunity to create unintended conflict between hikers and bikers there is no better example than this section of Birch Trail that is under review for conversion to a shared-use trail.

As bikers climb a steep section of Vista, it is natural for them to continue to the right and enter the Birch trail under consideration that prohibits bikes. ORA and the city have done an outstanding job marking the trail as being off limits to bikes, but cyclists are working hard to finish a long climb up Vista and must quickly see a small sign directing them not to continue and instead make a hard left turn to stay on the "shared trail." It takes a high biking skill level and advanced planning to successfully make the hard left turn and remain upright on the bike.

If you are new to the area chances are you may miss the signage that instructs you to make the hard left turn and stop riding on the trail you've been riding, needlessly setting off potential conflict between hiker and biker.

Designating Birch as a shared use trail is an additional small step in helping lower potential conflict and provide fun beginner trails for families.

Ralph Heath